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# THE WAY

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DEVOTIONAL STUDIES IN MYSTICAL  
RELIGION

BY  
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# THE WAY

## I

### OF THE SEARCH FOR GOD

"Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were, and were created."—*Revelation* iv. 11 (R.V.).

SUCH was the chant of the elders before the everlasting throne of God, and we may well say of it with Tertullian, "If such are the images of the vision, of what sort must the truths of the reality be?"

1. It is of this reality of God that I wish to write. We most of us know so much about God, and so little of God, that it is good at times to attempt the impossible, and to try to think what the reality of God is like. Of this reality we are all convinced; there is something in us stronger than thought, deeper than consciousness, which continually aspires to reach out of us to some vast goal which cannot be contained in the tiny mirror of our minds. That deep mystery, defying all the probings of science, which we call Life seems to contain in itself a secret, pointing darkly to something beyond and behind the curtain of human activity. If one tries to look on this phenomenon of Life, as a whole, it appears to be one vast stream of Becoming, it rushes through this world of ours making a temporary tabernacle of many forms, sheltering itself within the flower and the leaf, abiding for a space in the bird or beast, and then

passing on to some other resting-place. It is like one of those great pillars of air, raised by some atmospheric disturbance in Central Africa, known to the dwellers in the forests by the track of fallen trees and torn vegetation, but not otherwise visible to their eyes, which in turn crossing the Sahara enwraps itself in a pillar of sand and affrights the desert Bedouins as it whirls across the plain, till it comes to the sea and sucks up into itself a body of water, to the terror of sea-faring men. So Life appears unwilling merely to make itself at home in the universe, determined rather, while sheltering within a material form, to push on through the universe to something else. The wistful eyes of Life seem always set towards a vision which shall be a home. And we, who contain within ourselves some small particle of this same Life, share its secret and are impelled in spite of ourselves to its goal. We cannot, if we would, believe that this world is our final reality.

Hence it comes that a man must either deliberately kill something in himself or he must seek a God. Since then there is a universal search for God, we cannot escape two questions—Where? and How?

2. In what direction then shall a man, impelled by this deep thing within himself, seek for God? I suppose the answer will rise at once in many minds—in the Bible. I think we often forget that the Bible is only a translation of experiences. It does not contain God, or the full reality of God, for if the reality of God could be contained or expressed in human words, then God would be bounded by human thought and would cease to be God. The Bible is a guide-book to God; it describes under many forms and through many instruments this same search after God, its conditions, its problems,

and its lines of solution. The soul who seeks for God must surely learn by experience that its search can never end in anything which can be formulated in human words, for if God be comprehensible in His reality to the human brain He is not infinite. Some other instrument than mind or thought must be the vehicle of a journey to God. And does not this vehicle lie deep within ourselves, hidden in this instinct within us which compels us to the search? Surely in the depths of our being this aspiration up and out of ourselves is, and must be, connected with God, is, and must be, a link betwixt God and us enabling the soul to cross the gulf. This truly is the meaning of those words which God's Son spoke on earth, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, lo, here ! or, lo, there ! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." There is set in every soul a spark of the Divine nature, for ever forcing the soul towards God and for ever providing a means whereby it may know the reality of God. William Law, the most spiritual of our English divines, says somewhere, "The holy spark of the Divine nature, hid in man's soul, has a natural, strong, and constant tendency towards, or reaching after, that eternal light and spirit of God from which it came forth." All through Holy Scripture you will find this deep thing underlying the experiences by which men came to know God as He is. They clothed their experiences in pictures drawn with human words, for in no other way could they make themselves intelligible to those to whom they spoke ; but the experiences themselves were beyond words and happened in the secret places of the soul. Isaiah is but the type of all the prophets when he begins his book with the words, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amos."



I have expended many words in trying to make clearer a very simple thing, for the answer to the man who says "Where shall I seek God?" is, "Within your own soul—there, if you can but attain to it, lies the open path to God as He is, beyond all description, higher than any flights of thought, and more glorious than any earthly comprehension."

3. Since the instinct within us forces us to acknowledge the reality of God, and since the path to the experience of that reality lies within us, we are faced at last by the question, "How shall I seek this reality of God within myself?" In the first place, it is manifest that the search must be through some intermediary, and in the second, that it must be conducted by some activity which belongs, and is natural to, the soul. No one who attempts to picture man's nature beside God's nature could suppose that it was possible to pass direct from one to the other. The tiny helpless grain of sand and the glorious sun are not further apart than man and God. The sun bathes the grain of sand in its wonderful light, but the grain of sand has no power to seek the source of that light without a pillar of wind which shall lift it up out of its bed into the heights of the firmament. Unless there be a ladder whereby man's human nature can pass into God's infinite nature, man cannot experience God. Such a ladder was reared in Bethlehem some nineteen hundred years ago, when human nature was perfectly united with Divine nature, when "the Word was made flesh."

The search can only be through Jesus Christ, God and Man. The soul who seeks God without this intermediary finds itself lost in an ocean of despair and pessimism, as many a wreck of religious history bears witness.

The method of the search must be through Christ, or, to put it in plainer language, it is only possible to know the reality of God by first knowing Jesus Christ as He really is to-day, and as He will really show Himself to any soul who seeks Him desperately. In the second place, the search must be conducted by means of an activity which belongs to the soul. Since the secret is hidden within the soul, the means of attaining to it must lie there also. The one activity of our souls of which we are conscious, and which we can exercise at will, is Prayer. This provides the means by the use of which the soul may come into the real Presence of Christ, and through Him may experience the reality of God. And by Prayer I do not mean the saying of prayers, the vocal recitation of certain formulæ, but that which lies behind these and alone makes them real. I mean that aspiration, that forcing upwards and outwards of a desire, which is to Prayer what our life is to our bodies. If any soul will make its prayer real by this desire and earnestness, it must perforce come into the Presence of Christ, must find itself conscious that it is not alone, that it is not faced by a blank wall of emptiness, but by a warmth of love which bespeaks a person. And to all souls who attain to this I would say, that they should not strive so much to make themselves and their desires known to this Person as to know Him as He is. The busy soul is often so occupied with Martha, that the clatter of pails and pans prevents it hearing the words which our Lord is saying to Mary, and it is possible that there is only one thing in heaven more glorious than the angels' songs, and that is—their silence.

It is very presumptuous of any man to dare to talk

about the reality of God as He is, and yet surely God Himself gave the licence for this presumption when He put into man's soul that unquenchable spark which will for ever soar upwards. It is my glory as a man that I can dare to know and proclaim that this earth which bounds my vision, this universe which towers over me, is not my final home, is not my ultimate reality, that I can spurn it from me as being what it really is, a speck of stellar dust, and can turn with eager eyes to claim my inheritance in a God so vast, so infinitely glorious, that there could be no connection betwixt us had He not in boundless love made and set up a bridge whereby I can pass into Him and know Him as He really is, beyond all knowledge. And if any man, looking out towards eternity, with eyes enlightened with this knowledge, should say that anything in life can be of greater importance or of more absolute necessity than the prayer by means of which his search is accomplished, then he has denied the truth on which his life is built and has become a spiritual suicide.

## II

### OF THE JOURNEY

AMONG the most interesting of the by-paths of ecclesiastical lore is the study of symbols. From the beginning of history symbols have always played a part in the religion of humanity. It was always a necessity for man, a trick which would cloak his limitations, to substitute a picture for an idea which was too big for his mind. A picture, and especially an imaginary picture, is much more elastic than any word; it can expand and grow to meet the needs of increasing knowledge. If you analyse religious symbols you will find that they fall into classes. There is the type of symbol with which we are most familiar, the picture or object which stands for the main characteristic of a man's life and teaching. To this class belong the symbols of the Saints—the anchor of St. Clement, the wheel of St. Catharine, the keys of St. Peter. In most cases the choice of the symbol, following the example of Christ, has been taken from the instruments of martyrdom. There is next the type of symbol which expresses a truth concerning what God is doing for us. What He does passes our comprehension, and so we picture its main purpose. The outline of a Divine act is represented in visible form which suggests its inner meaning. The Sacraments are full of such symbols—the washing in

Baptism, the feeding in Holy Communion, the breaking of the bread, the lighting of the candles, and all the ceremonial which finds its place in worship.

There is lastly the type of symbols which is most frequent, if not universal, and which is most rarely spoken of. These are the individual symbols of our personal spiritual life. Each of us has some pictures, or rather a changing series of pictures, by which we seek to represent our relations to God and the attributes of our conception of God. It is interesting to try to trace the change and evolution of these symbols as we draw nearer to God. At first they are very satisfying and seem to represent in a compact form all that we believe; then we are forced to expand them, and in this expansion very often that which was a tiny detail in our first picture will force its way to the front and eclipse the whole, as we become aware by experience of some attribute of God which before had meant little to us. As our knowledge of God grows, the picture tends to become more and more a symbol, not a representation of reality, but an algebraic  $x$  or  $y$  which sums up in a convenient form all that we have garnered, and if we progress far enough we shall find that the crude picture with which we started has gradually evolved into the creed of the Church, the storehouse of the crystallised experience of the Saints of God.

We all use pictures in our souls, yet some of them are so big, so broad in their significance, that they are found to be common to a large number, or even to a whole class, of spiritual experiences. I think you will always find, when this is the case, that the symbol has the authority of Christ's own choice, who outlined the three main ways of approach to God when He said to St.

Thomas, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." Among these broad symbols which cover so great an area of spiritual experience is to be found one concerning the special significance of which I desire to write. It is the picture which represents the spiritual life as a journey, which sees the approach to God as following a road and ending in a city. You will find throughout Christ's teaching traces of this symbol. "I am the Way," He says, and again, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." He says of Himself, "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." It is this symbol which specially appealed to the early Christians, for we find that they themselves and their enemies spoke of their religion under the term of "the Way." Now if we take this symbol and examine it, I think it will be found that it contains elements of instruction. As men, from the study of dreams, claim to bring to life the hidden histories of our minds, so from the study of a spiritual symbol may be discovered what are the characteristics of the spiritual ideal to which we are moving and by which we are moved. We can learn from the analysis of the picture which we have chosen to represent our approach to God, what are the chief points of our desire, and the main ways of attaining it.

1. The first element which stands out clearly in this symbol of a journey is *Transience*. Those who have pictured their spiritual lives under this guise have confessed that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. If you look beneath the idea of this word "Transience" you will find that it concerns

the eternal contest betwixt the material and the spiritual. Every soul born into this world has to make the choice between that which is seen and that which is unseen. It is possible for us at any moment to choose the material, for, as the writer to the Hebrews says, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." The one big choice of life is followed by a multitude of little choices, made easier by the first choice, but still free, and capable of being decided in a retrograde manner; and they are always choices between the material and the spiritual, between the world and God. To those who march under this symbol it is of vital importance that the spiritual issue should decide each choice. They are pledged to drown the natural question, "Of what advantage is this to me?" by the spiritual question, "What is to the greater glory of God?" It is a daily struggle; never think that it has been decided once for all. It is said of those who are true to their symbol that God is not ashamed to be called their God. How terrible is the antithesis which that suggests. The shame of God when He is acclaimed by the materialist as his God; the shame of God when an empire seeking to add to its territory invokes the God of battles; the shame of God when the comfortable Christian, shutting his eyes to the miseries and injustices of mankind, opines that it is all God's will. We dare not stand still lest we become rooted to the spot, and whether it be possessions, or work, or home, or family, we must ever be ready to move forward and away at the word of command, holding firm to nothing save the will of God, trusting in nothing save His love for us, desiring nothing save His glory.

2. The second element which is clear in this symbol of a journey is that of *Direction*. It shows that in the spiritual consciousness of those who hold it, there is a vivid sense that there is a way betwixt God and man; that the soul is not left to wander by chance in the darkness, but has a well-marked and distinct track to follow. "Whither I go ye know," says Christ, "and the way ye know." We are apt to mourn our ignorance of God, but the real cause for wonder is that we know so much of Him. Looking at our limitations, and our poor human brains, we have cause for wonder that we should be able to comprehend in even the smallest way anything about Him; yet we find that if we do but take the venture the way is made so clear to us that only wilful choice can blind us to our next step. It is true that we walk as if in a fog, only seeing a limited space before us, but that space is very clear. It is a great source of wonder to souls who have crossed the low wall of death, that we should ever have any doubt—the way is so plain before our eyes that hesitation seems to them amazing. If we could ever reach the bottom of our hesitations we should always find there—effort. However clear the path there is always effort; we have to overcome the inertia of our humanity, we have to remove the obstacle of self-love. The next step forward is always going to mean giving up something, or facing the possibility of pain. It is because we are cowards that we always so magnify the cost of going forward that it seems to blot out the clearness of the way. When we profess ourselves in doubt as to our direction, it is usually because we dare not face the step which we know is prepared for us. To the soul who has courage the way to God offers no

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perplexities, and to most of us it is far too clear to be comfortable.

3. The third element which discloses itself beneath the symbol of a journey is *Consummation*. Those who hold that picture in their souls "desire a better country," and look for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." "I go to prepare a place for you," saith Christ, and trusting in His promise, we look to an end of our warfare and our wandering in some ultimate and everlasting perfection of bliss, which shall know no change, and which shall utterly satisfy God's glory and our desires.

All that is highest in us, all that raises us from the level of the beast, cries out for perfection. The fact that we cannot be satisfied permanently and eternally save by perfection is perhaps the only thing in us which can be termed Godlike. It is this prophetic desire, implanted in us by God, towards which we move, having ever before us the vision of a heavenly Jerusalem to lure us on. Through the mire of blood and tears, through the quicksands of sin and sorrow, through the night of doubt and despair, there shines "the least of little stars," and in that star "the spiritual city, and all her spires and gateways in a glory like one pearl," to hold us on our way and to assure us that we must go on. It is not perhaps good that we should spend too much thought on the end while we are still on our pilgrimage; yet it is allowed sometimes for the refreshment of our souls that we should dream of that city wherein the soul comes to union with God, where all its desires meet and are transfigured in one desire for the glory of God, for the satisfaction of His love and the fulfilment of His will. There the soul shares the

triumph of God and becomes partaker of His joy; there all barriers are broken down and all limitations are rolled away; there the soul, saturated with the Love of God, becomes all love. How great a proof it is, if proof were needed, of the existence and nature of God, that such an ideal has been sown and planted in limited, futile human beings, scarce able to lift themselves from this speck of the world, whereon they also are but specks. Such then, as I see them, are the meanings which underlie this symbol of the journey to God, and they play no small part in shaping the lives of those who accept the ideal which it represents. To such souls this world is a shadow show in which the only real thing is the light which shines on it from behind; they see marked clear through it a way to God which cannot be mistaken if one has but the courage to follow it; they see beyond it, in a heavenly city, a final satisfaction of all hopes, dreams, and desires. In such a symbol each church or chapel has also its part. It represents the wayside shrine provided for help and refreshment and guidance on the journey, a reminder to us that we are on the march, our backs turned to the world and our faces set toward "Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant."

### III

#### OF PENITENCE

"Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."—*St. Matthew iv. 17.*

OUR dear Lord, dwelling in eternity, hath ever His Face turned toward the present and the future. Nowhere does He speak of the past as complete, or as anything save a cause for action in the present or the future. In this our dear Lord gives great comfort to poor sinners. Were we to see a completion, an end, a shut book, or a finished record in our past, we could look forward to nothing save a final separation from our eternal good.

The history of our past is the long story of the base love of ourselves continually dominating and overcoming our weak wills, forcing us to satisfy the desires and lusts which weary us in the satisfying and bring weariness as the final satisfaction. Ever through this vicious circle we have seen glimpses of a better, nobler, more beautiful end, possible of attainment if we could but break away from our sins. It was these same glimpses which increased the weariness of our defeats and the bitterness of our remorse, for we understood by them that we had not only done evil, but also lost good and wounded love. Before every soul who comes to this point and turns to look at the past, there stands the Lord Jesus. He gazes not in the direction of the

soul's gaze, but ever steadfastly forward into the present and the future, and as He confronts the weary soul He speaks one living word—"REPENT."

In the light of His Presence sin is seen not to be a cause for remorse or depression, but for repentance. What is repentance? It consists of three parts: a consciousness, a declaration, and a determination. For, first, if you would repent you must be conscious that what you have done is wrong, that it is displeasing to our Lord, that it is bad in His sight, and a sorrow and disappointment to Him. To this end you will recall such sins as you can remember. You can think that He had to stand beside you and look at you while you did them. You can think how they and you would appear in His sight. Having thus gained the consciousness, you must pass on to the declaration. As the sins were put into a form, visible or invisible, by your thoughts and actions, so your consciousness must be put into a form or declaration. To this end, it is best that you should recite your sins truly in the presence of God. Lastly, you must have a determination to struggle against these sins. It is ever our danger that we seek refuge in vagueness from the real effort of the will, and it is best that we should ask our Lord to give us one definite way in which to crystallise our determination and express our will. Whosoever will, according to the utmost of his ability, carry out these three directions has indeed repented of his sins. It is most characteristic of our dear Lord that, as He stands before us, He is not content to give us the one clear command. It belongs to His Majesty, surely, to give a simple command without reason or qualification. But in His tender courtesy He goes on to give a reason, that we may the more easily

desire to obey the command. "For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He does not say, "Repent, because the things you have done are plainly evil;" nor, "Repent, for fear of the wrath to come." His reason is much more personal than these. For what is the Kingdom of Heaven? Is it not the place where He dwells, the light cast by His Presence, the radiance of His Divinity? He would have us repent for no other reason save that He desires our presence with Him. He so loves our souls that He yearns for us always to be with Him, rejoicing in His Presence as He rejoices in ours.

The evil after-effects of sin in the spiritual life are often due to the choosing of a reason for repentance other than the one our Lord has given. It is only the repentance caused by our Lord's love which can blot out depression and despair. In the midst of our sin our dear Lord stands by us, an incredible contrast in His stainless purity to our evil condition, and urges us to repent because He longs for our company. This is the truth which enables forgiveness to blot out the bitterness of past sin.

Moreover, let us note how our Lord considers our weakness. He knows that of all qualities, perseverance is the most difficult, that of all trials, waiting is the hardest, and so He tells us, laden as we are with sin, that this kingdom of His companionship is "at hand." Next to His surpassing humility in standing before us sinners, it is this compassionate understanding of our weakness which must most strongly draw us to repentance. The gulf betwixt sin and the Kingdom of Heaven is bottomless, but He shows us that it is so narrow that it can be bridged in the three syllables of repentance. It

seems as if in these words "at hand" our Lord specially safeguarded us against that depression and despair which mar both the repentance and the forgiveness of so many sinners. They tell us that we are to pass directly from forgiveness into His company, and offer a spiritual explanation of the position of the Confession and Absolution in our liturgy.

We have need, very often, to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus saying, "Repent ye," but even more often have we need to hear the reason that He gives, for the understanding of that reason makes real repentance possible. It would be well if we never thought of, or prayed about, repentance without recalling His reason for urging it.

Let us therefore turn to Him once again, trying to realise the immensity of the love which controls all His dealings with us. Our sins often loom so large in our sight that they are in danger of blotting out that love which is their only cure. We need to take heed to the promise, and, urged on thereby, to cross quickly the bridge of repentance and enter that Kingdom of Heaven which is so close at hand.

## IV

### OF FORGIVENESS

It needs only our experience of bearing witness in a court of law to convince us that all our consciousness is partial and that we are oblivious of half our material surroundings at any given moment. It needs but little more experience of the spiritual life to make us certain that our consciousness of our spiritual environment and state is even more defective. We know, however, that if we are forewarned that any given moment in our earthly life is liable to become the subject of legal proceedings, we can greatly increase our consciousness; and, in the same manner, if we were forewarned of any spiritual experience, we could augment our consciousness considerably. It is evident that great advantages can ensue from such augmentation, for, in normal life, the greater the consciousness the deeper the impression, and the deeper the impression the more marked the effect in character and life.

There is one experience of the spiritual life which will always fulfil the condition of being foreseen. God's forgiveness of our sins requires certain preliminary activities on our part—confession, contrition, and amendment. We cannot be forgiven without preparation, and therefore we are always forewarned of the spiritual experience of forgiveness. We should expect, for this reason, that our consciousness of forgiveness

would be fuller than usual, and would make a deeper impression on life and character. It is a common complaint that this is not the case, and even when the complaint is not made, it is often only too evident that absolution is too soon forgotten and too little valued. Doubtless there are many reasons which account for this failure to appreciate God's great gift at its proper worth. Amongst them I should give a high place to the Anglo-Saxon characteristic of immediately concentrating attention on the next effort when anything has been accomplished. The soul who receives absolution is often so full of plans and resolutions for the future that it has little attention to spare for its present state. Another frequent cause is to be found in that species of self-centredness which fixes its gaze so earnestly on the sins revealed that it has no time to consider forgiveness, and in such cases forgiveness, instead of giving joy, makes no mark on the depression in which the soul wallows. It is very easy also to become formal in any frequently repeated act, and formality is destructive of consciousness.

It would be hard to exaggerate the loss in the spiritual life when there is little or no consciousness of forgiveness. Absolution is the tonic of the soul, and if it makes no deep impression, the effort to follow Christ becomes harder and harder. Further, the consciousness of forgiveness is one of God's great methods for increasing our little love, and without it we tend to carry out the requirements of religion as a duty, and not as the gift of love; we become servants when we have the right to be children. There are, of course, times in every life when it is not possible to attain to this consciousness; in times of spiritual darkness, when all the comforts



of the soul are withdrawn by God, no soul can hope to perceive the gift of God's forgiveness in any clear way.

It is not easy to describe in words any spiritual state; for human language owes its origin to the material needs of man, and its development in the realms of the soul has been slow and halting. Nevertheless an attempt must be made to set forth what is meant by the consciousness of forgiveness. It is marked, in the first place, by a perception of freedom. We may forget the details of our wrongdoing, but any real sin remains as a drab background perpetually overshadowing our daily life. To be conscious of forgiveness means that we are aware of our release from this grim companion. The weight which prevented us from rising to our proper level of peace and joy is cut away, and we are free and unencumbered. This in itself must give rise to a sensation of joy and lightheartedness. It is marked, in the second place, by the assurance of safety. We dare not meditate too often on the awful and inevitable results of sin; the experience of a religion too engrossed in such contemplation has proved, in the case of our Calvinistic forefathers, that it is unhealthy; but we can never escape the knowledge which comes to us from the clear words of Christ and from what we learn in our prayers, that sin means separation from God here on earth and a condition terrible beyond our imagination hereafter. The greater the progress any soul makes in the life of prayer and the consciousness of God, the greater becomes the certainty of this fact, and it helps us to understand why, in former days, when men thought more often of Sin and Hell, the keyword of religion was Salvation. To be conscious that we are forgiven means the realisation of our safety from the grim penalty of our sin.

We rest secure on firm ground where before we had been in a deadly quicksand. There are few things which more truly strengthen our spiritual hold on God than this realisation, and from it spring an abiding trust and a real peace. God swings me in the cradle of absolution over the abyss of Hell, and thereby I learn the true security of Trust. From this assurance of freedom and safety there rises the crowning mark of the consciousness of forgiveness. We become aware of love. We are so made that we cannot be rescued from misery and danger without feeling gratitude, and this gratitude grows into love. The deeper the conviction that we have been freed and saved, the fuller is the love which begins to work in us. We know this love by its fruits, by the desire it brings to give something to God. It is this love which changes a penance into a joy. Every soul after forgiveness should be conscious that it loves God.

There are many souls who ask how they may grow into this consciousness of forgiveness. We may say truly that all consciousness lies in the gift of God, but after we have acknowledged this, we must recognise that our perception of any spiritual state can be greatly increased by our own efforts. Wherever there is true repentance we may take it for granted, not only that God forgives, but also that He wishes us to be conscious of His forgiveness. It is our part to endeavour to be receptive to that which He gives. If we are to do this we must go direct to that which is the centre of all forgiveness. It is in the understanding of the Crucifixion of our Lord that we find the only preparation which can open the soul to the consciousness of absolution. The contemplation of Christ on the Cross is an art

—an art to be learnt only by long practice. As we meditate on His Passion and Death, all manner of new light and understanding comes to us. We realise the greatness of our peril as we fathom the vast humiliation of His suffering. We realise the greatness of our security as we gaze at the gift of the Father on Calvary. We realise something of the love which is to awaken our love. No one can hope to be truly conscious of their forgiveness unless they have studied long and carefully in the text-book of the Cross, and if this is the preliminary condition, there is also a condition which follows after absolution. We need to meditate more often on what has been done for us personally, by the forgiveness bestowed upon us. It is well that we should set our faces to further progress, but it is loss if we do so before we have considered well what we have already received. To accept God's gift and to pass on at once is but slight gratitude. As we meditate, under the guidance of God the Holy Ghost, on the absolution we have received, we shall become aware that there is much more in it than we had thought; its freedom, safety, and love will open out before us as we look.

It is then by this double meditation on the Crucifixion of Christ and on the real effects of absolution that the soul can increase its consciousness of forgiveness, and in so doing receive a new access of strength and spiritual life.

## V

### OF THE TRUTH

"His truth endureth to all generations."—*Psalm* c. 5.

ON a bright summer day, countless thousands of years ago, there came through Sussex a lizard. It was some sixty feet in length and considerably larger than an elephant. It was doubtless attracted by the almost tropical vegetation which covered the delta of the vast river which flowed over the south-east corner of England. In the spot now known as the Weald of Sussex it stayed a moment on some moist ground to pluck the topmost branches from a tree, and its great bulk caused its three-toed hind legs to sink deep into the soft clay. The hot sun speedily baked the spot where it had paused, and the footprints were fixed. No tongue can fully tell the changes which passed over that spot. The waters rose and covered it, but the impression remained. The earth rumbled and shook and cracked. Great mountain ranges rose into being. A sea of ice spread from the North Pole and poured over it, grinding the surface of the earth with boulders and rocks carried beneath vast glaciers, but the footprints remained. After countless ages, when the ice-fields had retired and man had appeared, the soil was ploughed and cultivated, but still the prints remained. It was not till the beginning of the last century that labourers digging in a field discovered them, and called a learned physician to see their

discovery. Then, still unchanged, and bearing unchangeable testimony, they became manifest before the world.

You have here a parable, the subject of which might be called The Persistence of Truth.

1. It would be hard to find a better example for the setting forth of that subject than the historic fact of the Ascension of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. If ever there was a fact which tested to the full our powers of belief it is this. Just think of it : it is vouched that a human being, in the presence of a number of witnesses, rose in bodily form from the surface of the earth, and passing from sight, entered, still perfectly human, into the perfectly divine. Is it any wonder that such a statement should rouse storm after storm of dissent, ridicule, and denial? The troubled history of the early Church bears witness to attacks from without and from within. Heathen philosophers and vain heretics assail the truth from every side, persecution is tried and fails. From these storms emerges the unshaken truth firmly set in the faith of men. Through the centuries the same process continues. It is probable there has never been a period in Christian history when scepticism was so strong as during the Renaissance, yet the truths of the Creed appear unshaken when the storm passes. In the last century German critics and English scientists delivered assault after assault, and when the shouting and the tumult died away, men found the Creed unshaken. I would call your attention, therefore, to this peculiar quality of the truth—the way in which it persists. It is like a rocky pinnacle on a stormy shore, swept and battered and covered by the waves, yet ever emerging unshaken and glittering in the sun. I cannot but think that among those wonderful

helps which God has given to aid the weakness of man, this is not the least, for it gives to humanity both a test of truth and also a security in truth which has been tested. It is my desire to trace this great quality of the truth in the individual spiritual life rather than in the history of the Church.

2. The Ascension is no isolated fact, for God and the nature which He created abhor such. The whole teaching of our Lord developed from the principle of His Incarnation, and therefore He constantly taught His followers that where He went, there they must follow, and that what He did they also were to do. In the case of our Lord's Crucifixion this teaching is generally accepted, but we are much slower to accept it in the case of His Ascension. Yet our Lord could hardly have been more definite in what He said to His disciples: "Whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know;" "I leave the world and go to the Father;" "I go to prepare a place for you." It was quite evident that those who followed Him were not only to climb the hill of Calvary, but also the Mount of Olives, that in each spiritual life, besides the agony of purification and sacrifice, there was to be an ecstasy wherein the soul was uplifted beyond earthly limits. I think we Christians have often been afraid to think of this, partly through fear of presumption, partly because we are conscious that such an uplifting in prayer means a new standard in life. Yet the example of our Lord is steadfast before us, and it becomes us to see its bearing on our own lives. And if this example is pressed upon our notice with special force at the festival of the Ascension, there is also a type, an image, a picture, which is impressed upon us continually and at all times. In the Blessed

Sacrament we offer to God a sacrifice, a most holy offering, the only offering to be found on earth which is in truth worthy of the Majesty of God—the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the very offering of that sacrifice is the picture of that ascension which is the climax of the spiritual life, a picture nowhere set forth more beautifully than in the words of the Liturgy of 1549, where prayer is made that, by the ministry of Holy Angels, our offering may be brought up into the Holy Tabernacle of God and before the sight of His Divine Majesty. There is, therefore, a great personal truth impressed upon us each year in the festival of the Ascension, each day in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice. Nor is it only a truth which is impressed from without, for it is also experienced within. It is very hard to describe a spiritual experience, for man in such moments passes beyond those borders within which the language of earth is current, and the account he brings back is at best but a translation. Most frequently I believe such an experience befalls the soul at moments of worship and adoration. While the soul is engaged in this, the highest activity possible to man, it becomes conscious that the horizon before it, where self loomed so large, is entirely filled with God. It becomes aware of an intense power of attraction continually drawing it upwards and inwards. A lightness and freedom so intense that it seems almost physical pervades the soul. All the effort and concentration which mark so much of our prayer have vanished and the soul feels that it could not resist if it would. I do not think that beyond these few indications words are of much avail. The experience of an all-surrounding perfect Love and Power can be received, but not expressed. This is the

personal truth of Ascensiontide, the truth that, as our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into the heavens, so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell. And it is to the persistence of this truth that I would now call your special attention. As the historic fact of the Ascension has been assailed from every side, so must this personal truth which it teaches expect assault. What could be more inconceivable than that we, specks of dust on a world which is itself a speck of dust in the celestial system, can be personally drawn up into God? Yet through the long centuries man states and believes that such can be. Saint after saint affirms that such is. The truth persists, and in persisting proves itself the truth. Again and again in the life of the soul the truth of this experience is attacked. "Surely," the tempter says, "it was only imagination," or "Some physical condition is responsible for such a state." Yet ever the tempted soul, acknowledging the strength of the suggestion, goes back to the helpless reiteration that here was something unlike anything else in the world, something that left a mark alike on memory and on life. It is customary to think of saints as rather credulous people; such is not my experience. They are the most incredulous of people, ever insisting on the danger of self-deception, and seeking with a pure passion for reality and certainty. Nevertheless, no soul who has experienced this personal truth taught by the Ascension can ever deny it. Beyond explanation or argument it returns with a savour which is not of this earth, which defies all explanations save one.

There is an old Jewish legend which relates how Jeremiah the prophet, before the Temple was destroyed,

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took the Sacred Ark of the Covenant from the Holy of Holies and buried it beneath a great rock. And he said, "The Lord has departed from Sion into heaven, but the law-giver of Sion shall come again, and this shall be to you the sign of His coming." Then the legend tells how that above that spot a luminous cloud shone by day and night in token of the holy thing that was there enshrined. So it is with every soul who experiences this truth, for though that which has happened is buried beyond thought or expression, yet a luminous cloud hangs over its memory, telling of a holy thing there enshrined. So through every attack the truth persists, and in persisting proves itself.

There is no more dangerous mantle to assume than a prophet's cloak, yet no thoughtful person can fail to be aware of the direction from which the next attack upon our religion, and especially upon our personal religion, is to proceed. Among all the branches of science there is one which during the past few years has shown a growth, rapid and precarious, beyond all others. It is in the science of Psychology that there have been recently such developments as to almost justify the term New Psychology which has been applied to its latest expansion.

If I mistake not, the next attack upon the truth will come from exponents of the psychology of the subconscious. They will try to prove that all spiritual experience is the result of physical instincts or nervous conditions. And, once again, we shall see the essential quality of truth shine forth. The attack will be violent and dogmatic, it will gradually develop and broaden, it will finally find beneath the subconscious the unplanted depths of the soul. I suppose that to each generation

its special attack on the truth seems the most deadly there has ever been, yet it is hard to imagine anything which could do more damage to tender souls than the attempt to shake the foundations of spiritual experience. Yet in the end we shall have to acknowledge that through it Christianity will receive a great help. It is a characteristic of our nation to place too low a value on spiritual experience, and this attack and the inevitable persistence of the truth through and beyond it will give a higher place in our thoughts and life to the religion of experience.

I have tried to put before you the great quality with which God has endowed the truth. I have tried to show how, alike in the historic fact of the Ascension and in the personal truth taught by it, the waves of assault have always broken over it and, retiring, left it unchanged. You have seen something perhaps of the attacks which await the inmost life of your soul. There remains only the application of these things to your daily life. That application I find in the call for greater courage. Go forward undaunted in your search, the great search, the only search for Christ. Whatever fears, adversities, or doubts assail you, go forward calmly in the knowledge that the truth persists, and will prove itself in persisting. Though prayer be hard, though your soul walk in darkness, though your spiritual memories be shadowed by many a doubt, go forward secure in the knowledge that the truth of God endureth to all generations, and by its endurance will prove itself the very truth. To all who show such courage shall come the day when that same Lord Jesus, who ascended up into heaven to prepare a place for us, will grant our prayer "that where He is, thither we might also ascend, and reign with Him in glory."

## VI OF FAITH

"When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?"—*St. Luke ix. 54.*

WE all accept as a universal truth that the one necessary foundation for our religion and the condition of our salvation is faith. Yet there are few things harder to define than faith. I remember as a boy being greatly impressed by the fact that faith was a necessary and glorious quality, but being equally impressed by the fact that no one could succeed in explaining to me what faith really was. It is often possible, when words are insufficient to express an idea, to gain some knowledge of its nature by means of a picture or a character study. In such pictures and characters the truth is often rendered more vivid by contrasts, for it is by them that we can learn most easily about people and things. I seek, therefore, in this contrast offered by the young St. John and the old St. John to find a clue to the nature and quality of faith.

We see first this young man, his eyes flashing with just wrath, his hand outstretched in the act of violent denunciation, and only rendered more terrible by the light of burning certainty shining on his countenance, which proves his threat no empty one. On the other

hand, we see this same man, his hair pure white with the burden of years beyond ordinary, tottering in his footsteps, supported in his feebleness by two stalwart disciples, while he straightens himself with an effort to preach his last sermon to the Christians whom he has rescued from darkness and despair. At last he is able to utter those few words which he holds to be the summary of Christianity, "Little children, love one another." Both these scenes are from the life of the blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John. As we picture them, we might say in haste, "What a change time has wrought," but that is not the truth; there is no change: the latter scene is the fruit and direct result of the former. If there were no St. John threatening the inhospitable Samaritans, there would be no St. John preaching the Divine love. It is interesting to trace the growth of the gentle Apostle of Christian love from the hot-headed young man who would call down fire from heaven; it is somewhat more than interesting to see how the foundations of that later admirable character were laid in a faith which must be at the bottom of any great Christianity to-day.

I. "Wilt Thou that *we* command fire to come down from heaven?" Oh, the superb insolence of it! These elements before which man has shivered from the beginning of time, the thunder rasing the echoes of heaven, the lightning flashing death and destruction upon the earth—these have become but the merest incidents to the man who rested on the breast of Christ. Or, again, beyond the insolence of the man see the daring of the Christian. Was not Moses banished from the promised land to die on the desolate slopes of Nebo because he once said "*we*"? Yet this young man can

dare to grasp the reins of the universe and propel the forces which God created. Insolence! Daring! Yes, it was both of these, and yet more than both of these, it was faith. For what is faith but the supreme insolence of a man, the glorious daring of a Christian? A man, confined in human body, chained to the beast by flesh and blood, fettered to the earth by food and drink, says, affirms, believes that there is a life beyond this, a God to whom he may be united, a power with which he can be filled. If this be not insolence and faith, I know not what is. Yet more, a Christian, one who knows the goodness, the greatness, the awe of God, one who is conscious of the insult, the malignity of his own sins, who still *will* assert that God can and does love him—verily this is daring, and it is faith also. I find then in the young St. John a faith such as is seldom seen on earth. It was a faith that knew its power. He did not doubt for one instant that a cataract of flame was ready to descend from the sky and do his bidding, and he was right. Had Christ but nodded His head, there would have burst on that Samaritan village such a furnace outpour that the burnt ground would have attested the miracle for generations to come, and it would have been the work of St. John himself, for Christ spoke no empty words when He said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove." Being a mild generation we stand rather aghast at an exhibition of faith which could wipe out a village, but that is because we forget the saving clause, "Lord, wilt Thou?" This is the real faith, because it is not only insolent and daring, but also obedient. Its actions are ruled by the will of God. So much for the faith of

the young man. And now to find that same faith working in the old man. Some sixty years after, we find St. John, young no longer, a cosmopolitan and an educated traveller. Palestine is a small country to him now; he has known and studied "the grandeur that was Rome and the glory that was Greece." He has lived in the midst of culture and wisdom, and his character is one which respects and admires all thought and learning. In the midst of such a world, impregnated with its feelings and opinions, he sits down to write the story of how God became a Galilean peasant, called Jesus, and of how that same Jesus, now ascended into heaven, feeds His followers with His flesh and blood. Do you think St. John did not hear the guffaws of the thinking men of his time, as he wrote such things? He did, and the old insolence, daring, obedience, the old faith, in fact, made his fingers grasp the pen more firmly, while the clear, sharp-cut words gave the message of hope to men. The faith of the average Christian to-day seems puny and anæmic by the side of St. John's; it is a faith that argues and questions rather than asserts and claims. Yet the need for faith has not decreased with the passing of the centuries. The age of miracles is not passed, it is still in full swing. Lives can still be saved, disease still be cured, disasters still averted, by faith. We need a new insolence, a fresh daring, an obedience not to our doubts but to God's Will—that is all.

2. "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and *consume them*?" In this faith of St. John there was another quality. Here was a group of surly Samaritans blocking the road, checking the spread of the Gospel. "Are they to succeed?"

he asks. "Are they to starve other men's souls by their stupid obstruction? No," he answers. "Away with them, blot them out from the face of the earth, rather than delay the work." To the young apostle they had ceased to be men—they were obstacles. The glorious chariot of the Gospel of Christ finds its road barred by this barrier! Why then this barrier must be burst and shattered. I find in this young man's faith a quality we may call zeal, a quality admirable wherever it is found. His faith teaches him the thing is true, his zeal is a great force of energy which fills this faith with power. There is something grand about a man the moment he says "I will," "I shall," and with a set face and firm mind starts to push his way through everything. This quality is generally called by those who do not admire it, "obstinacy," and they are apt to forget that what the Jews called obstinacy was nailed to a cross and won the salvation of men. But we have yet to trace this zeal working in the faith of the aged writer of the Gospel. When do men usually write their books? I think the majority are written before the author is fifty, the exceptions are written at the age of sixty. The author of seventy must be a man so prepossessed of his ideas and so earnest in their propagation that he will not give way to the burden of his years. When we find an author over ninety, if not a hundred, years of age, we are entitled to claim for him an almost superhuman zeal. So I see the zeal of the young man, which would sweep through every hindrance, bending itself to the study of the life of the Son of God on earth with a determination to master its secret. With that determination unweakened, in spite of grey hairs and bodily frailty, he works for sixty years, then, every

obstacle laid low, his unconquered will forces his time-worn body to the almost miraculous work of writing the greatest classic of the ages. It was the zeal of the young apostle which wrote the gospel of the ninety-year-old evangelist. The Christian is like a man walking down the road to everlasting life who comes to a place where a wall is built across the way; it is built differently for all of us; sometimes it is built of sins, more often it is built of the interests and worries of our daily life. Very many of us fail to get beyond that wall, but those who have the zeal of St. John, push and batter and worry that wall down. Zeal! that is what the Christian life needs in its faith. We want to feel about our religion that it is a matter of "I will, I shall, I must." We sometimes talk of trying to get people to take an interest in religion. That is a hopeless phrase. We want to get people to take a battle-axe or a hammer into religion—something with which to batter a way through.

It is this faith and zeal which make St. John a special example for us. Remembering him let us renew our faith and zeal. If you would share that faith in all its freshness you must seek the same company which he kept. In prayer you can still find the risen Lord and be filled with the inexpressible freshness of His life. Thus will your faith be renewed, and within it zeal and desire, working together, will bring forth fruit worthy of your calling. It is the safest of all courses to be daring, if only you believe. This is the secret of the faith of St. John.



## VII

### OF DANGERS ON THE WAY

#### (i) SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

KING DAVID, at the very climax of his glory, when he had conquered his enemies, established his kingdom, and was yet unstained by his great sin, wrote a song for the use of his people, setting forth all that God had done for him and the various ways in which his troubles had been turned into blessings. One phrase in his song must refer to a very personal episode, to some occasion when he was caught in one of the little fortified towns of that day. The host of the enemy was encamped about the place, and there seemed no escape. On every side he saw impassable obstacles. Then suddenly he discovered, like St. Paul, one unguarded spot in the wall, and by a perilous leap he made his escape. So doubtless he came to write the words, "In Thee I shall discomfit an host of men : and with the help of my God I shall leap over the wall." It is worthy of note that the Psalms have always helped the souls of men because their writers saw in all the daily events of their lives nothing but spiritual symbols. Everything that happened to them outwardly was to them a picture of something which happened in the soul. We can, therefore, with profit consider what is the spiritual meaning of "leaping over a wall."

It is not without point that in this particular adventure David was in the centre of his difficulties. His obstacles were not in front, or at the side, or at one particular point, but all round him. He could not look anywhere without seeing them. If we take this as a picture of our own spiritual adventures, it manifestly applies especially to one type of temptation and difficulty above all others. The soul has to carry on a perpetual warfare against the forces of self-love, but self-love has one form which more than any seems to surround the soul on every side. This form of self-love is usually called "self-consciousness." It is the continual and almost automatic centring of our thoughts on ourselves as we appear in the eyes of others and of the world. It has many forms, varying from that mental torment which shows self to be at the root of every action we do to that outward nervousness which inhibits our necessary actions and activities. In all cases it proceeds from gazing at ourselves rather than at Christ.

By such perpetual "self-looking" I do not mean a deliberate and sinful act, but rather a habit which has grown up, often in youth, and become so strong that it cannot be shaken off without a mighty effort. The result of this habit is to make our difficulty apparently irremovable, for the more we gaze at self the more we magnify its importance and power. The soul who has grown into this habit feels like David, shut in by high walls and surrounded by an invincible host, a very prisoner in the prison of self-love.

Now David's escape is full of suggestion, and this suggestion all points in one direction. "With the help of my God I shall leap over the wall." The word "help" implies co-operation. His escape was not one

in which he was passive while God accomplished the miracle. David had to be active, and God's miracle was displayed in the result of that activity. Again, the word "leap" points not only to effort, but even to superlative effort. To gain God's all-conquering grace in our escape from self-consciousness and self-gazing we have to put forth the greatest effort of which we are capable, for it is certain that our way to freedom is through something done by us at a great cost and then used by God to save us.

Manifestly we must begin, as David did, by looking upon the obstacles as surmountable. We must be assured that there is a way of escape somewhere if we will only look for it. We shall find, I think, in this matter of self-consciousness that at first there seems to be no way of escape from it, it seems to be on every side and present at every moment. Be assured that there is a way if we will pay the cost and take it. Let us try to translate this into practical terms. We know that God has called each one of us to do some work for Him. We know that it is His will that this work should be done as well as possible. We know that our self-consciousness is a hindrance to our work for Him. Therefore we know that He wills that we should overcome it. We have no right then to believe otherwise than that He will free us from it if we do our part. We must start by impressing on ourselves daily the belief that God wills that we should conquer this habit and that He has provided a way in which we can do so.

We may be sure that David, before he took his leap, surveyed the ground, to make sure, as far as in him lay, what was the best way and to make his leap as safe as he could. So the soul seeking to escape from

self-consciousness must proceed to think out the causes of this habit, endeavouring to see how it first arose and how foolish and useless it is. It is essential that we should see how little reason there is for it. It is a help in this matter to remember that self-gazing magnifies everything, and that it exaggerates to an enormous extent the amount of attention other people pay to us. It is probable also that such attention as others give us is due in no small measure to this same self-consciousness which exaggerates all that we do and makes it more noticeable than it would otherwise be. Again, it will assist us to see how often it arose in childhood when we were nervous and sensitive, and when those in charge of us, not understanding this, treated us unwisely; from this source there has often grown up a morbid habit of introspection, and much of our self-consciousness is a childish habit which we have never faced and conquered.

Nevertheless, however much we survey the causes of our trouble, we cannot escape the effort which is required to conquer it. David's effort was a gathering together of all his energy to utilise the way of escape. It is only by gathering all our force and directing it in one direction that we can be freed. What is the one direction? It is clear that it is the direction away from ourselves. We need to concentrate all our attention on that which we are doing rather than on ourselves. The "leap" for any soul imprisoned in self-consciousness is an effort of concentration made so continually that at last it becomes a habit. Let us try again to get this into the terms of our daily life. It means that we must endeavour to turn all thoughts about ourselves into thoughts of what we are doing. I think this is specially needful

in private prayer and in public worship, for it is one of the hardest features of self-consciousness that it so often invades prayer and worship. Each thought of self then should be a call to renewed activity applied to the matter which we have in hand. Whenever we discover that we are becoming introspective or self-conscious we must apply ourselves with more earnestness to the work upon which we are engaged.

Such is the method by which souls escape from this insidious form of self-love, and, needless to say, it is a method which is useless without the special help of God, given in answer to our prayers. However hard we try, it is only by a gift of grace that we shall succeed. We must, therefore, bring to our dear Lord our state of imprisonment and ask Him to make us "free indeed," and then we must make our daily effort, and so we shall be set at liberty.

There is one sense in which all souls have to leap over a wall which encloses them. For all of us there is the certainty that we have to cross one day the wall of death, the barrier which encircles humanity. To some souls this is a cause of fear, perhaps to all souls at some period of their lives. To this wall also the word of the Psalmist applies. It is by the help of God that we shall leap over this barrier, and again that help requires our co-operation. It is by a steadfast faith which does not shrink from considering what is before us that we shall prepare ourselves for that last effort. In thinking of death we must again concentrate our attention outside ourselves—that is on the Lord Jesus. We should endeavour never to think of dying without thinking of Him. The more we fix our attention on Him, and the meeting with Him, the less will the idea of death imprison

us. It is not enough that we should determine to do this when we come to die, we must do it whenever the thought of death comes to our mind, and so shall we discomfit the host of the enemy. It should be the mark of every Christian that the thought of death has no terror, but this will only be a universal mark when every Christian sees Christ each time he thinks of death.

Let us take comfort, therefore, in the knowledge that however grim and unconquerable seem the circumstances, or the feelings or temptations which encompass us, there is a way of escape if we will only put forth a big effort and co-operate with God.

#### (ii) SELF-COMPARISON

From the ancient city of Jerusalem there rose a multitude of towers and turrets and spires and pinnacles, so that the beauty of that city seen from afar off was beyond mortal tongue to tell. Now it came to pass on a day that two pilgrims were approaching the Holy City. When he saw it from afar off, one of them burst forth into many exclamations, and presently he set himself to mark which was the highest pinnacle. "For surely," said he, "that is the one which will rise from the summit of the Temple of the most High God." And first he was assured that a certain pinnacle was the highest, but anon, when the road turned and he beheld the city from a new side, he would have it that another was the highest, and then again, when the road descended into the valley, yet a third had the pre-eminence. At each new view he must needs expound the matter to his companion, who said never a word. And at last, being wroth with his friend's silence, he said

to him, "Have you not yet noticed how such an one is higher, or whether such an one is the highest of all?" "Nay," said his companion, "I have but noticed that all alike point upwards."

In this simple story is set forth a truth much needed by souls in their progress towards God. Our minds travel along a narrow path, on either side of which are the high walls of Time and Space, which limit our view. So in our thoughts we are continually driven to measure and to calculate because we think within finite boundaries. Thus it happens that in every spiritual life the question arises again and again, "How far have I progressed?" This question is a great hindrance to real advance in prayer and life. If it is answered in optimistic moments it leads to pride, if pessimism is dominant it leads to despair. In no case can it be helpful, for only God knows our state, and though the direction of our growth can be evident in our life, its rate of progression can never be measured. But the real spiritual danger lies in the fact that these questions about progress are selfish in their origin. They distract our gaze from God and direct it to ourselves. What profit were it (supposing such a contradiction to be possible) for a selfish soul to reach heaven? It would be like a person cast away on an island in the Pacific, where everything around was beautiful and the person was lonely and in misery. Such is the folly we commit when we are harassed about the stage we have reached. Our Lord is a Forester who walks in the midst of His wood, wherein are some tall big trees, many of moderate size, and many very little ones. Yet He is concerned only with the question of whether they are growing, and not of their size. It is the tree which shows no green shoots, where the boughs

are dying, and the parasitic growths increase, which causes Him anxiety. Every soul should be anxious to grow, should endeavour to grow, but the rate of the growing is of little moment, for we cannot measure it, nor if we could would it help us. There is a further consideration to be noted. All growth comes from God; we do but supply the conditions in which it is possible. With God there is no consideration of Time; a day, a year, a thousand years are one in His sight. So it comes to pass that for one soul the fruits of growth may appear in a year, for another in ten years, yet the growth of those souls may be at the same rate. I have seen souls who advanced quickly at first, and other souls who advanced slowly, and yet both attained the same state of prayer together. The times when we think our progress to be slowest are often the times when it is fastest. We cannot measure, because we have never learnt the measure wherewith God measures. "When thou art bidden," saith Christ, "go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher!" This is true counsel for every soul, for it is to souls sitting in the lowest room of humility that our dear Lord comes and gives them speedy promotion to the highest room. Thus it comes to pass that the soul which is most certainly convinced that it has made no progress is the soul which grows more quickly than any. Now the conclusion of the whole matter is this. We should dismiss from our minds all thoughts concerning the rate of our progress, and all speculations concerning the exact position of our souls on the road to God, for all such ideas are selfish in origin, distracting in action, and deceptive in result. We should rather be content

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to leave our progress in God's hands, endeavouring only so to live our lives that progress is possible, and knowing that the surest place of advancement is the lowest. For this cause also it is very useless, and often it is dangerous, to discuss with others our spiritual state and experiences, unless we are clearly moved thereto by an interior call of God. Such discussions, unless they be ordered of God, lead almost invariably to attempts at measurement on one side or the other. Now if it be foolish to try to measure our progress in the sight of God, it is idiotic to try to measure it by comparing ourselves with others. To every soul God reveals Himself in His own way, for religion is, and must be, personal, and therefore the marks of progress differ with every person. We shall do well to leave our reward to God, who is more generous than our dreams can imagine, and centre all our efforts on enabling Him to give us a reward.

### (iii) SPIRITUAL SLACKNESS

It is not possible for us, who live on earth within the prison walls of time and space, to see the truth, the real truth as it is known in eternity. So much the more, therefore, should we listen to the words of one who, living in eternity, sees all things as they really are. Christ our Lord, looking down through all the centuries to our day and thence onward to the end of time, called the whole sum of time "a little while." How then can a lifetime be described in the language of absolute truth? It were an exaggeration to speak of it as a moment. In the heights of prayer it sometimes happens that souls pass from the tyranny of time, a moment becomes unending or an hour flashes past like a second.

At such times it is possible to be conscious of the extreme shortness of life. It seems to me that it is a good thing to have constantly in mind the shortness of our life on earth. There is nothing which more surely saps the vigour and zeal of our efforts than the prospect of a long and monotonous continuance of them. There is nothing which is more bracing than the knowledge that we have only to hold out for a brief period and we shall reach the conclusion. If we dwell too much on the length of a lifetime we diminish our strength. As our Lord watches us struggling on earth, it must seem incredible that we should grow slack when we have so short a distance to go and so much depends upon our journey. At the present time the danger of slackness in spiritual things is very great. We are surrounded by the atmosphere of an exhausted world, and there is no living being who is not touched by it. It is well to consider once again the purpose which binds us together. We have set forth to find God, to find Him in no vague or uncertain way, but, if it be His will, to touch Him, to experience actually, by means of those hidden and mysterious qualities which He has placed in our souls, the very nature of His love. As a condition of our venture we have pledged ourselves to put all else in life on a lower level, and thus search above on the heights. We have recognised that the search involves a continued warfare against our self-love, that there is no cessation of struggle, and that our desire for God must be always dominant in mind and will. Of all deadly temptations which wreck the adventure there is none more fatal than slackness. The gradual lessening of desire shown by the breaking of rules, the raising of other interests to an unduly exalted position, the withdrawal from the

struggle against self-love, are signs that the soul has repented of its pledge and lost interest in its great venture. It is not amiss to examine the profit and loss account of such a soul. There is a little more leisure gained for activities which soon weary, but the activity of prayer gave zest to all the rest of life. Even when prayer is hard it makes the rest of daily life much more worth living. That is experience, and I cannot account for it. To the slack soul there seems profit in being without rules, but we soon find we must bear a yoke in this world, and that Christ told the truth when He said that His yoke was light. Further, in the life without rules there is the constant weight of a conscience not at ease.

It was said of Brother Half-and-Half, by one who knew him well, that he paid a bigger price for his discomforts than other men paid for their comforts.

Heavy too is the loss of the soul in lowering its ideals. Our ideals are the mercury in the thermometer of life, and when they are lowered we begin to feel cold; the fire and the youth go out of a life with lowered ideals.

In my sight, therefore, slackness in this spiritual adventure is the worst of all enemies, and the loss it causes is the greatest of all losses.

We need to take up our warfare against slackness daily, remembering that we have only a little while in which to make our search for God—that the struggle is not long, though it is so vital. Let us beware of all the little signs which are warnings. The failure on one or two days to keep our rules, the passing by of little slips into uncharity or pride as of no importance—these things call us to a renewal of desire. I believe that in most lives spiritual slackness has its birth in a lack of

thought about God. It is where prayers are too self-centred, where only the times when we are tired are given to prayer, that it begins to show itself. And, as we should expect, the cure for it is to be found in meditation or in the spiritual use of such portions of the Liturgy as the Sanctus and the Prayer of Consecration. If we do not ever spend time in considering the great Love of God for us, it is not wonderful that our love should grow cold. It is very easy to give God a duty when He asks for a love-gift, and unless we think about His love for us every day, our spiritual lives will soon degenerate into a series of duties.

"A little while and ye shall see Me," saith Christ. Is it much to ask of us that for a tiny space more we should give all our efforts and all our interest to this adventure, when the end of it is to be the sight of the Lord Jesus? Let us awake out of our slackness, for the night is far spent and the day is at hand for each soul. We have no time to waste if we are to keep tryst with Him who has called us.

#### (iv) FEAR

"The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."—*St. John* xx. 19.

If you have ever been through any grave crisis, any moment when you have been in imminent fear of death, you must have noticed how the small things of life occupied an altogether disproportionate position in your mind. Men who have been rescued from the very brink of death report that their attention was fixed on the veriest details at the moment. This habit of

the human mind finds an illustration in the behaviour of the Apostles at the first Eastertide. They themselves were actors in the greatest of all historic scenes, they had just witnessed events which were to change the course of the world and the life of mankind. We picture them as immersed in the understanding of that which had happened, lost to all other interests, and absorbed in the memory of the Crucifixion and the report of the Resurrection. Then we suddenly come across one of those graphic little touches which throw such light on character and motive. "*The doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews.*" It was no rapt and uplifted body of men, illuminated by a blaze of spiritual light, which sat in that room; but rather a group of very frightened mortals, huddled together, listening nervously for the tramp of armed feet echoing in the narrow street, or the hoarse command to open the door, or, more terrible still, the first distant outburst of that roar which betokens the fanatical crowd hunting a human prey. Vast might be the meaning of those scenes in which they were taking part, but overshadowing all thought or remembrance was the gnawing fear at each man's heart, the dread of that which the next moment might bring forth. They sat in silence, waiting, listening; when suddenly from their midst there rose the low, clear voice they knew so well, "Peace be unto you."

Again the Evangelist inserts one of those descriptive touches which show us the inmost feelings of the Apostles. "*Then were the disciples glad.*" In one minute their whole outlook was changed. Their fear was gone and in its place was gladness. Such was the marvel accomplished by our Lord's appearance; the cloud was

lifted and their joy, because of its very contrast, was the greater.

It seems to me that in this event which befell the Apostles we have a lesson much needed in our own day. We live in a world which is overshadowed by fear. The whole of Europe is dominated by fear—fear of starvation, of war, or of tyranny. Each individual has passed through years which made fear a daily habit—fear of bad news, of defeat, of death or injury to someone beloved, of danger to oneself. It is not remarkable if in most lives fear has become an habitual guest, nor do I doubt those who ascribe many of our troubles in the body politic to the same cause, and see in the rash actions of whole classes amongst us the result of terrors bred in the past. It is an undoubted fact that these nervous disorders, which have never been so prevalent as they are at this day, arise for the most part from fears which are repressed and which in turn react, making life an intolerable strain. Face to face with such tendencies we are forced to ask, "What is the answer of Christianity to *fear*?" It will help us to answer this question if we notice that there was an intermediate step betwixt the disciples' terror and their gladness. The words of Christ apparently were not sufficient, for we read, "*When He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad.*" It seems from this detail that in the first moment the sound of Christ's voice was not sufficient to disperse their terror. We can guess the reason from what follows. It was because some remnant of doubt still remained. Our Lord removed the doubt in the same way as He cured St. Thomas—"He showed unto them *His hands and His side.*" Then, and then only, they

fully trusted Him, and then, and then only, were they glad. There are, therefore, two requisites which together make up the answer of Christianity to fear: the first is the Presence of Christ, and the second a full trust in Him. Christianity cures fear by bringing the Christian into the Presence of Christ and teaching him to trust Christ wholly and without hesitation.

Now the subject we are discussing is a very practical one. I imagine there is no one of us without some special fear hidden away at the back of his mind, which at any moment may swell up and dominate and darken his life. It may be fear of disgrace, of loss of money or employment, of sin, of sickness, or of death. Whatever its exact nature, we do urgently need to know how to deal with it, and the part our religion has to play in meeting it. It will be well, therefore, to examine in detail the cure provided by our religion, the same cure which turned the terror of the disciples into gladness. In the first place, if we are to conquer our anxieties we must come into the Presence of Christ, and to some extent be conscious of His Presence. It is an axiom that the more we look at ourselves and consider our own feelings the more alarmed we shall become. It is this brooding upon the cause of the terror and its probable effect which drives so many men to rash acts. To look away from ourselves, to fix our attention upon an outside object, will help us; how much more to fix our gaze and thoughts on the figure of Christ saying to us, "Peace be unto you." But this is only the first step. You will notice that the disciples' apprehension was first lightened by listening to the voice of their Master. We must go on, after we have fixed our gaze on Christ, to listen for His voice. Let us place our trouble

fairly before Him and then listen, that we may catch that which He has to say to us. It is not easy to do this, for our first impulse is to keep on thinking about our trouble and the way by which we can avoid it. If we persist we can at last listen, and one moment of listening to Christ is worth all our talking. In that moment when faintly we become aware of what He would say to us begins the healing of our terror. It is to my mind a most rational and sensible thing to try and lay before our Lord especially all our fears and apprehensions when He comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament, for there not only can we listen to His voice, but also we can receive His Life, and so be strengthened to resist the temptation to fall back into the old condition. When you are heavy laden with anxiety and misgiving, turn first to Christ Jesus. Think of Him and try to listen to Him. Sometimes, indeed, when our need is very great, He will allow us to feel His Presence in a special way, to give us a certainty as great as that of the disciples when they saw His hands and His feet.

In the second place, if we are to be free, we must have absolute trust in the Lord who is present with us. If anyone should think that this trust is a quality of sudden growth, which will appear when the occasion calls for it, he is much mistaken. Trust in God is a thing of slow growth, and our emergency will find it wanting if we have not cultivated it from day to day in the smaller issues of our life. Trust grows by regular stages. At first we learn to say to our Lord when we are faced by difficulties, "I want to trust this matter to Thee," then, as we become accustomed to this step, we learn to go further and say, "I trust Thee in this trouble," and



at the end of our apprenticeship we are able triumphantly to declare, "I *know* that Thou wilt remove my fear." It is a matter of spiritual experience that our Lord requires from us a very large measure of trust. If there is any hesitation in our trust, any idea at the back of our minds that we can do this or that in the worst event if our Lord does not help us, then we cannot hope for the speedy removal of our apprehension and distress. We are required to face the subject of our terror boldly, to fling away all our attempts at subterfuge, and, trusting solely in Christ, to defy its power.

Among the rules of the Mohammedan religion there is one which ordains that every Moslem once in his life shall make a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca and there go through divers rites and ceremonies. One of these ceremonies stands out by reason of its picturesque nature and the noble lesson it teaches. The pilgrim is ordered to go to a village a few miles from Mecca. In the middle of this village stands an ancient stone pillar, probably the last relic of one of those idols destroyed by Mohammed when he set up his religion. This pillar is supposed to be associated in some way with Satan and to represent him. The pilgrim on approaching the village gathers seven stones, and these he has to hurl publicly at the pillar, reciting aloud, "In the name of God! I do this in hatred of the Fiend and to his shame." By this symbolic action, Mohammed taught his rough followers to face the powers of evil and all the terrors they impose on an Eastern race, and to show openly and clearly their trust in God to overcome them. The ceremony has a lesson for us. We are required, as followers of Christ, to bring all our forebodings and terrors into the Presence of our Lord, and there to assert our

trust in Him by defying and renouncing them. This exercise of trust may well have to be repeated again and again, but each repetition will strengthen its power, and success is worth any effort. We read that the disciples, after they had given their full trust to our Lord, "*were glad.*" Their gladness was very great, for there is nothing which can augment joy so much as contrast. At one moment they sat shivering in terror, the next they were at peace and full of joy, and the peace was so much the more valued and felt because of the terror which had preceded it. Such is the experience of all who succeed in bringing their fears into the Presence of Christ and trusting them to Him. They find a new joy and a new peace, greater than they have experienced at any other time or in any other way. And from this new peace springs forth a new gratitude. There is no thanksgiving so fervent as that which rises from the depths of our being when our Lord has freed us from a hidden terror or a secret foreboding.

We live in times when no man can escape from apprehension; he cannot look upon the state of his country without fears, he can hardly look upon his own future prospects without misgivings. There is one way, and one way only, of safety—the way which our Lord taught to His disciples. We must, each one for himself, bring our fears, terrors, and dreads into the Presence of our Lord, we must listen for His voice speaking to us about them. Then, having done this, we must give Him unhesitating trust, defying our thoughts and obsessions by repeating again and again our certainty that He will order all things for our good. So shall we enter into that heritage which belongs of right to every Christian—the liberty of the children of God. We are no slaves

in bondage to terror, for we have been freed at a great price, and we must claim our freedom and enjoy it. To each tortured soul who this day shrinks under the load of trouble, doubt, or perplexity, the voice of Christ is speaking. Listen, and you will hear, as clear and as omnipotent as they ever were, the words of the Lord Jesus saying, "Peace be unto you."

## VIII

### OF TEMPTATION ON THE WAY

THERE is one subject which constantly finds a place in the background of the mind of every Christian. Whether we will or no, we are continually thinking of temptation. It is not only because temptation is a perpetual threat against the safety of our spiritual life that we are conscious of it. Rather it is because we feel that there is something mysterious about the thing, something we must try to fathom and understand.

There is in the Second Book of Chronicles <sup>1</sup> an account of God's dealings with the people of Judah which presents some notable analogies to His dealings with the soul who is tempted. In making a short study of Temptation it has seemed best to follow the history of the army of Jehoshaphat for the sake of its ordered process and apt symbolism.

1. *Temptation*.—The first news of the great danger which was threatening his kingdom came to Jehoshaphat in vague terms. "There came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee." Doubtless these were fugitives fleeing before the rumour that the tribes in the south-east were on the march. They had at the most seen the distant clouds of dust or the smoke of burning villages. They were not spies from the enemy's camp, for they knew

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xx.

nothing of the dissensions among the allies which ultimately brought the invasion to a disastrous end. It was the very vagueness of the news which raised the king's terror to such a pitch. He knew nothing of the numbers or of the plans of the invaders. His imagination, assisted by his knowledge of the history of the past, magnified the danger beyond even its true proportions. In the end he was possessed by fear. "We have no might against this great company; neither know we what to do."

This is a picture of the soul faced by temptation, for always the might of the approaching foe is magnified by its vagueness and by imagination. If it be a temptation we have experienced before, we cannot estimate the force with which it will come. We know that in the past, when we have thought it conquered, it often returned with renewed force and gained a victory. We know that it may come in new and surprising forms. The result of such imaginings is to fill us with fear. We are nervous of its appearance in the distance. I feel that it is generally harmful to think of our temptations, unless it be for some special purpose and for a limited time, as, for example, in preparation for confession. If we ponder too much on our temptations they are apt to become suggestive and to produce the very atmosphere which we wish to avoid. For this reason it is good that our prayers about temptation and sin should be general and positive, rather than detailed and negative. It is much better to pray for honesty than to pray that we may be preserved from stealing something. This is specially true in the case of sins against purity, where suggestion is peculiarly strong. And above all we must avoid fear. It is fear

which relaxes our resistance and puts us in the best state for the tempter. All vague and unmeasured forces tend to produce fear, and one of the best ways of conquering it is to bring the vague and mysterious into the light, to observe and analyse it. For this reason confession is of the greatest assistance to the tempted soul, aiding it by removing the vagueness of temptation. This may seem to contradict what I have just said about thinking of temptation, but there is a great difference between contemplating a thing in one's own mind and putting it into words for the consideration and advice of another. It is probable that the greatest forward movement of our generation lies in the recognition that fear is a great hindrance and that it can and must be banished in the individual and in the nation. Each soul may be well assured that fear of temptation is a hindrance to the spiritual life, that it weakens resistance and suggests defeat.

2. *Resistance*.—Jehoshaphat, in face of the threatened invasion, took immediate steps to resist the enemy. He gathered together not only his army but the whole of the nation. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. He set himself to seek the Lord. He prayed. It is worthy of note that the bulk of his prayer is not petition or request. Two-thirds of the prayer consists of an affirmation of faith, and only in the last verse do we find direct petition. In answer to this prayer the voice of God is made manifest through the prophet Jahaziel. Then the next day the whole nation goes forth to battle. Again we note the absence of the former fear. We find that they do not go on the march chanting a Litany, but a Psalm of praise, "Praise the Lord : for His mercy endureth for ever."

It is a most pressing problem for each one of us, to find the best way of resisting temptation. We cannot do better than to follow the example set us in this picture. In the first place, we must take immediate steps. The sooner we find out the exact nature of our temptation and the practical way to deal with it the better. Delay means that sin acquires all the strength of habit. We see how the King called upon the whole nation. In like manner we must use not a portion of our energy on one side of our nature, but the whole effort of which every part of us is capable, if we are to emerge victorious. Our plan of resistance will consist in taking every precaution in body, mind, and soul which will lessen or stop the temptation. In general it may be said that such precautions will fall within the compass of two or three simple rules. Most of our falls are due to disobeying those simple and common-sense rules which God makes clear to us. The next step in resistance is harder. It consists in faith. Trust that God is both able to and will deliver us in the hour of our temptation. I think we find this so hard because we have so often fallen into sin in spite of our prayers. We are apt to forget the details of these falls and to remember only that we have fallen. We forget the breaking of our rules or the small but deliberate acts of self-pleasing which led up to sin, and only remember the fact that we prayed. There is no doubt about the matter. No soul in this world who has sinned need have sinned. No soul has fallen into temptation and been defeated who could not at one given moment have won the victory if it had chosen. If fear be a dangerous weapon in the hand of the evil one, his deadliest poison is despair. Despair is the negation of faith, it is the

affirmation that there is no help in man, no hope in God. The soul who turns his back on trust gives up all chance of victory. When we have to pray about temptation, the major part of our prayer should be an affirmation of faith. We should say to God, "I trust Thy pledge given to me in Baptism, I trust Thy life given me in the Sacrament, I trust Thee to give me strength to resist and to deliver me from the evil." It is in answer to such faith that God's message of encouragement comes to uphold the soul, and there is a further step which we can take. Although Jehoshaphat had not yet had any assurance of the promised victory, he proceeded on his way praising God for it. Praise is faith active. Real trust in God is a very unselfish thing, and finds an outlet in that most selfless of spiritual activities which is in the capacity of man. The soul who really trusts forgets itself and remembers God. The Sanctus is the fitting complement of the Prayer for the Church Militant. When we have affirmed our faith that God will enable us to conquer our temptation, and have asked His immediate help, then we should end our prayer with praise, giving Him glory for His goodness and ever-enduring mercy.

3. *Deliverance*.—It was at the watch-tower in the wilderness that Jehoshaphat reached the consummation of his spiritual experience. He came expecting a great, if victorious, battle, and found the battle had already been fought. He found also that the victory was far more complete than could have resulted from any victorious battle undertaken in his own strength. He brought back with him a rich booty in which the whole nation shared.

It is very true to spiritual experience to say that

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surprise is nearly always one element in its joys. We were made children of God in our baptism, and God knows that surprise makes up half the joy of children. We never know the moment when the final victory is coming in any temptation. We find that we have conquered, and we are amazed. The mountain is removed into the sea and blotted out, and our faith is so weak that we cannot understand it. We have all just stood on the top of the watch-tower in the wilderness and have been too startled to thank God. For God does give complete victory over temptation. It is true that there are always other temptations beyond, but each in turn ends in complete victory for the faithful Christian. We find in such cases that the temptation has lost its power; that unless we deliberately go to seek it and encourage it, it has no enticement; that, in fact, it needs an effort on our part to give way to it. This complete conquest must come to each soul as a wonderful proof of God's existence and love. It allows of no other explanation to the soul who experiences it. It is to be observed that the people of Judah only reached their deliverance after a crisis which had tested them to the utmost. It is so with us. We find that little effort brings little reward, and that temptation is never conquered unless the soul has made a great effort and been through a time of severe testing.

We notice, finally, that the victory of Jehoshaphat brought with it some far-reaching results. "The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries . . . so the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet." We shall readily see in this fact a picture of *our own* spiritual experience. We are so made that we cannot *grow in one virtue without growing in all*, we cannot conquer one temptation with-

out weakening all the others. When any temptation is overthrown we become stronger in every way—stronger in prayer, stronger in spiritual sight, and stronger in our powers of resistance. The victor in the fight against any sin returns with rich booty. It is also true that such a spiritual victory generally precedes a period of peace for the soul. Our Lord allows us, for the most part, a rest after battle. This is a true rest, quite different from that momentary respite with which the evil one often tempts us after we have sinned.

We learn by the bitter experience of temptation that the spiritual life is not a matter of devout feeling or mere desire to be good. It is through temptation that most of us first comprehend how serious a matter it is—a very matter of life and death, involving struggles for survival which are fierce and primitive. It is by the conquest of temptation that we learn the other side of the soul's adventure. We see in the light of such a victory a faint glimpse of that triumph which Christ won on the Cross and holds in pledge for each soul that wins through the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The faint echo of the glorious triumph of the Saints reaches every soul who stands upon the summit of the watch-tower in the wilderness.

## IX

### OF HUMILIATIONS ON THE WAY

It was the custom in ancient days for certain men who desired to mortify their bodies to wear, concealed from sight, a cumbrous piece of armour which caused them great discomfort. In consequence of this custom, the term "habergeon" was applied not only to armour but also to an instrument of penance. This double use of the word makes it a fitting symbol for the part played in the spiritual life by humiliations, which alike mortify the love of self and protect the soul from pride.

The teaching of our Lord about humiliations is very clear and direct. He speaks of them in their extreme form so as to include all lesser forms. "*Blessed are ye,*" He says, "*when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.*" He lays down also the manner in which His followers are to receive humiliations. "*Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*" From such clear teaching we can gather the very important part these wounds to our self-love are to play in forming us after the likeness of Christ.

Those who have set themselves to find and follow our Lord have always been well assured that it was only by humiliations that they could be made humble and pleasing in His sight. Margery Kempe, the ancess of

Lynn, and the forerunner of Julian of Norwich, heard the voice of the Lord Jesus saying within her : " Patience is more worth than miracles doing. Daughter, it is more worth to Me that thou suffer despites, scorns, shames, reproofs, and wrongs, than if thy head were stricken off three times a day every day in seven years." Yet there is probably no form of spiritual discipline from which we shrink more sincerely, and no form of pain which we strive more earnestly to avoid. It is profitable, therefore, for us to consider the purpose and work of humiliations on the way.

It is one of the most difficult things in the world to find out what we really think of ourselves. When we try to look at ourselves we are "*like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass : for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*" It is impossible for us to measure our own opinion of ourselves till some outward incident throws a light upon it. Again, we are confused by the fact that we have at least two opinions of ourselves. There is one which we may call " the surface opinion," which we review in our minds and correct by our ideals. There is another which we may call " the subconscious opinion," which is hidden and instinctive, yet, probably, much more real than the surface opinion. Now, humiliations are the result of the clash of some exterior judgment with our own opinions of ourselves. They arise when we become conscious of two different levels of judgment : the judgment of others about us, and our own judgment of ourselves. It is when the judgment of others rejects or alters our own subconscious judgment of ourselves that we are really humiliated. In such cases we seek defence from the humiliation in many ways. We put

up a barrier of self-justification and excuses in order to blunt or cast off the humiliation. We criticise the source of the humiliation in order to raise ourselves to a superior position from which we can look down upon it. We point out the applicability of the humiliating judgment to others in order to hide ourselves behind them. In all these ways we seek to avoid or to nullify that which our Lord teaches to be most useful to our spiritual life. They are signs of wilful self-deception, of the desire to preserve intact our own deep belief in ourselves, however full of pride it may be. If we examine the method of this defence we shall be struck by one fact which may help us in destroying it. In nearly every case we commence our refusal of humiliation by an excuse. Of all the signals which give warning in the spiritual life of the approach of danger, there is none more constant than the excuse. It is always the forerunner of pride. When we see that we have made an excuse, then we should straightway suspect pride and fear the loss of a valuable humiliation.

There are many different types of humiliation, public and private, light and heavy, worldly and spiritual. Our habit of rejecting or receiving them will give us a measure of the extent and locality of our pride. Some can receive any censure in private, but grow angry if it has the least publicity. Some will acquiesce if the censure is put tactfully, but will retort if it is severe. Some will bear with calmness any rebuke about worldly matters and lose their temper if their spiritual state is hinted at as dubious. Yet each soul who desires to follow Christ may be certain that it will receive the humiliations suited to it and the ones which will most help its progress. Do not give way to the thought that you could stand

the humiliations which come to your neighbour if only you could be spared your own, for the humiliations of your neighbour would not help you to grow nearer to Christ.

If through prayer and effort we succeed in accepting humiliations, they become the quickest way of progress, for we speedily arrive at a right valuation of our own worth. The qualities or talents of which we are most proud are the very centres of pride which resist Christ and prevent Him from entering into us. The height of our desire is that our life should be no longer our own, but the life of Christ in us. He cannot take possession of us wholly till we have nothing of our own. When, by the acceptance of humiliations, we grow to see that the things to which we cling are nothing worth and have no real existence, then we can truly seek them from Christ, and Christ can wholly supply them. There are many ways of accepting humiliations. We can suppress excuses and self-justification. We can agree with the censure. We can in silence thank God for it. Our Lord thus spoke to Margery Kempe, according to her understanding: "Daughter, if thou wear the habergeon or the hair shirt, fasting on bread and water, and if thou saidest every day a thousand Pater Nosters, thou shalt not please me so well as thou dost when thou art in silence and sufferest me to speak in thy soul." It is when we thank our Lord in silence for an humiliation that He speaks a powerful word in our souls. Strive always to reach beyond the degree of acceptance which you have attained in any humiliation. If you have only been silent, strive to acknowledge the justice of it. If you have acknowledged the justice, strive to thank the rebuker. If you have done these things, strive to

have a real and silent joy within you when you tell our Lord about it.

There is a further question about humiliations which is not easy to answer. How far should we seek them or pray for them? One saying of our Lord seems to direct us: "*Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

Our Lord seems to contemplate the possibility of our own action in the process of humbling, and therefore the possibility of our seeking for humiliations. It is evident that there are many dangers in such a course. In some cases it might well be a rash and presumptuous act which would result in a speedy fall. In others, it might lead to great self-consciousness and the increase of spiritual pride.

It seems evident, therefore, that we must have safeguards in seeking humiliations. In the first place, we ought neither to pray for them nor seek them unless our Lord has given us a great desire for humility and we have steadfastly counted the cost of bearing them. Any rash or hasty prayer for them should be avoided. It is a matter of experience in the spiritual life that at a certain stage of progress our Lord does give to the soul a vehement desire for humiliations. Again, the sign that we are to seek them may come from some outside source. In direction or in conversation with others we may be made aware of our pride and of the need of seeking humiliations in certain directions.

In the second place, if we seek humiliations we must be careful that they conform to the standard method which our Lord laid down for all devotional practices. They must be hidden, not visible to other eyes, and

allowing no possibility of praise from others. It is not easy to find humiliations which fulfil these conditions, but when our Lord guides our search we soon reach treasure.

The highest and best humiliation is that which is given to the soul by our Lord in darkness. Then it is that He purges invisibly the hidden pride of the soul. Nearly all the sufferings of darkness come from the resistance of pride to the working of our Lord, and they manifest themselves in so many different forms because pride itself is so multiform.

I would pray that we might all don this armour of the soul against pride, but I would pray it in fear and trembling, knowing my own weakness, making my own the quaint prayer of Margery Kempe, who, having asked our Lord how she might best please Him, heard His voice in her soul : " Daughter, have mind of thy wickedness, and think on My goodness." Whereupon she made this prayer : " Lord, for Thy great goodness, have mercy on my great wickedness, as certainly I was never so wicked as Thou art good, nor never may be though I would."



## X

### OF OPPORTUNITIES ON THE WAY

#### (i) OPPORTUNITY USED

"And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him."—*St. Luke xix.* 33-34.

IF one could imagine a vast theatre in space wherein were gathered all living souls, past, present, and to come; and if the curtain were on the point of rising on some new episode, we should watch with interest and awe those who stood in the wings about to enter and play their part. We should expect even the merest super among them to tremble at the experience of facing such a vast audience. It was allotted by God to the owners of the colt to be the first to make their appearance on such a stage in the opening of the vast scene of the Passion and Death of Christ. Prophets, looking forward with dim sight, had described the scene, foretelling even this, its introduction. Men through all the ages since have gazed upon it, beholding the central Figure seated on a colt. What a destiny then to be the owners of the colt!

As we picture them, in conjecture, they were humble folk, not rich enough to own individually a beast, but sharing one between them. They lived in a village and doubtless worked in partnership. There is no reason to suppose that they were other than very

ordinary people, interested in the world which passed by the cross-roads where they lived, but much more interested in the gaining of their daily bread and the circumstances which affected it. On this day of all days in their lives they were gossiping at the cross-roads, and the colt was tied to the house door. No doubt they were discussing the movements of Jesus and His entry into Jerusalem, the popular feeling about Him and His teaching, and the local views as to the result of His mission. They knew and approved of Him, were even perhaps prepared to join the crowd that applauded Him if it passed their way. Then suddenly and unknowingly they are drawn into the history of the saving of the world, they stand for an instant to be photographed before all living creatures, they contribute one necessary item to the eternally planned progress of the Son of God.

I see them at that moment in the state of dim consciousness which is so characteristic of our daily life. They suddenly observe the disciples loosing the colt, and instantly the sense of possession is aroused, and quite rightly so. "*Why loose ye the colt?*" they demand. With the answer, "*The Lord hath need of him,*" comes the moment of destiny for them. I do not think for an instant there was any clearness in their minds. They were aware of the force of self-love. Why should their colt be taken rather than another? Was there not likelihood that it would suffer injury or be lost? However estimable the purpose of its moral, was there any reason why they should bear the expense? Opposed to these questionings were the unselfish desire to please another, the belief that the purpose of the colt's removal was good, and the willingness to share in it. No doubt

in the background were other half-selfish thoughts which nevertheless urged acceptance of the removal—thoughts of what their neighbours would think, fears of hostility from the crowd in the event of refusal. And finally, I believe, in the inmost recesses of their being, they were aware of a faintly discerned voice telling them that there was something big and vital in their choice. So in those men opposing forces gathered for battle in complicated array, hidden in the mist of a dim consciousness. Such a little question, to be decided in the fraction of a minute, and so vital for them to decide rightly. The Waterloos of the soul are fought on an area no bigger than a postage stamp, and their duration is often measured in seconds.

If we isolate for a moment this decision of the owners of the colt and consider it, we shall see that while it appeared very small it was really very big, and further, that at its root was the fundamental spiritual struggle which decides the life and fate of every human being. What on the surface could be more trivial than the loan of a piece of property which was not in immediate use? It was to all appearance one of those small questions which each of us has to settle daily. Yet how much in reality hung upon it. We can hardly realise in these days how great a part the prophecies of the Old Testament played in building up the faith of the first Christians. We have behind us the long centuries of the history of the Church to strengthen our belief. To the Jew, trained from childhood to rely on tradition and the letter of Holy Writ, a prophecy was the surest foundation on which to base faith. To the crowd on the first Palm Sunday, and to the early Church, the fact that the prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled was a very sign from God that the Messiah had come. It lay

with the owners of the colt, all unconscious though they were, to give or to withhold this support to the weakness of men, to add one more stone to the building of the Church or to deprive it of one more atom of strength. Nothing can be really big which is not in essence spiritual. We expect, therefore, to see at the root of the owner's decision a spiritual struggle, and such there was. There is only one sin we can commit against God, and that sin is to love ourselves more than God; every sin in this world is born of this sin. The owners of the colt had to decide on the spur of the moment whether the love which they bore to one of their possessions, because it was their own, was to prove greater than their desire to please another and to do what they felt dimly to be a higher and nobler thing. It was the struggle between self and God. And yet again it was, in the truest sense of the word, a spiritual crisis, because in it was involved their personal relationship to the Lord Jesus. They had met Him and received from Him some benefit, either spiritual or material, for otherwise they would hardly have accepted so readily the title "*The Master*." They had to decide in that instant whether they would honour His personal claim on their reverence and gratitude, or refuse it. Perchance in the end, as so often happens in real spiritual crises, the whole question was settled on this personal relationship.

It seems to me that the owners of the colt, however short their appearance in history, however small the importance of their part in the drama of our redemption, are entitled to our sympathy and fellowship. They faced and solved the most common of our daily problems and lifted it into its proper position. They taught, to those who follow after, the sanctity of the small choice.

We are accustomed to measure the choices of our daily life by the apparent results which are to be expected from them. Such a standard of measurement is very deceptive, and there are choices which appear small which are in reality great.

There is only one true standard by which to measure our choices. It is by the spiritual motives which lie behind them that we can really gauge their importance. In the case of the owners of the colt, the opposing motives were their personal relationship to our Lord and their love of their own possessions. It was these motives which made their choice a big one. For all that is spiritual is eternal, and therefore a choice decided on spiritual grounds has eternal results. It may be reasonably objected that the choice of those men, like most of our own decisions, was made while they were only very dimly conscious of spiritual motives. Yet the fact remains that, however small the consciousness, it was the spiritual motives which caused the ultimate decision.

Looking at our spiritual life from the point of view of experience, I think it is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the small choice. In the first place, it is by these choices that we form habits, and habits are our defence in the hour of trial. Each time that we decide a question on right lines we make it easier to repeat the process in future. In reality we are then forming the habit of growing into the likeness of Christ in one respect. We are grafting on to our lives the imitation of one of His virtues. In the second place, we know well that there must be crises in our life. Times of special testing or temptation, when they come, seem to be overwhelming and terrible. We cannot hope to face them without

preparation. Souls do not conquer temptation at its greatest unless they have already conquered it at its smallest. It is just our daily choices which offer us this chance of preparation. Through them we grow stronger and stronger, till we are ready to face the time of testing and temptation. But, without doubt, the secret of the importance of small choices is most readily to be found in the fact of our personal relationship to our dear Lord. As in the case of the owners of the colt, the personal relationship to Jesus was the factor which determined the conclusion which they reached, so in the small choice of our daily life it is the same relationship which usually settles our decision. Loyalty to the friendship which Christ offers to us decides the way in which we solve the little problems which may be, and so often are, of such great importance.

It is for this reason that we must always strive to prelude the small choice by offering it to God. We must get into the habit of offering an ejaculatory prayer to our Lord whenever we have to come to a decision. Left to ourselves, we shall, very often, be swayed by selfish motives, but, if we have the presence of mind to offer the choice, strength will be given us to choose rightly, and we shall have lifted up the whole matter to its proper level of personal relationship to Christ. It is a matter of experience that, when this is done, we often become conscious of a distant voice, of a movement of the conscience, which gives us the right direction. It is quite true that a great many vague feelings and intuitions rise within us, and that it is possible to be misled by attaching too great importance to them, but there is all the difference between the value of such sensations before and after we have offered a choice to God.

There is in most healthy people a very real dread of the danger of introspection. We cannot be too thankful for this dread, since it is a great safeguard against morbidity and self-consciousness. Its influence may lead us to fear that if we examine too closely our small choices and their motives, we shall be for ever on the watch and in danger of scruples.

It is, therefore, well to point out that what is urged is not the examination, but the offering of the choice. I would warn all souls against reviewing their choices, or prolonging the discussion of them. The owners of the colt had to decide on the spur of the moment. In most of our choices the same is true for us, and once we have decided we must leave the matter. To go back over the ground of our choice, to be full of questionings and doubts about it, is simply to breed scruples and to lose all spiritual peace. Offer the choice to God, solve the problem as quickly as you can, and then leave it finally without a backward glance. In the use of such a method there is no fear of introspection and no ground for scruples.

I should not rightly conclude this study of the sanctity of the small choice if I did not try to show its place in the whole scheme of growth which makes up the life of mystical prayer. In that scheme there are two main elements—life and death. Life through an increasing communion with God, death to the love of self which hinders that communion. The small choice, indefinitely multiplied in number, makes up no small part of the element of death to self-love. No one has expressed this more clearly than Dr. John Tauler : “ When a man dies to a scornful word, bearing it in God’s Name, or to some inclination inward or outward, acting or not acting

against his own will, be it in love or grief, in word or act, in going or staying; or if he denies his desires of taste or sight, or makes no excuse when wrongfully accused; or anything else, whatever it may be, to which he has not yet died, it is harder at first to one who is unaccustomed to it and unmortified than to him who is mortified. But a great life makes reply to him who dies in earnest even in the least things, a life which strengthens him immediately to die a greater death; a death so long and strong, that it seems to him hereafter more joyful, good, and pleasant to die than to live, for he finds life in death and light shining in darkness."

There is no short cut to God, no smoothly paved by-way which will lead to the Heavenly Jerusalem. It is only when we have to negotiate the multitude of boulders which obstruct the way that we know for a certainty that we are on the road to God. But if, faithfully and day by day, we offer our choices, I do not doubt that we also shall have our part in the triumphal procession of the Son of God, even as the owners of the colt did on the first Palm Sunday.

## (ii) OPPORTUNITY LOST

The Bible is full of lights and shades, and in the shades work many tragic or grotesque figures. The high lights, as is natural in a record of saints, shine on the heroic figures of the past, but in the background we can see the figures of lesser men displaying all the follies and ironies of life. Among these we discern dimly, as the most unconsciously tragic of all, the innkeeper of Bethlehem.

He was in all probability a typical hotel-keeper, busy

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and much engaged, a lover of gossip, as becomes one who is the newsmonger of his village. There is no reason to think of him as in any way worse than his neighbours. To this most ordinary of men there comes a sudden rush of business. The Government decrees a census, and, ever careful, in the Roman fashion, to consider local custom, orders that it shall be taken by tribes and families collected at the original home of their descent. Bethlehem being the centre for the Royal tribe, the village is rapidly filled with people anxious to claim their notable ancestry. The innkeeper, with a thankful heart, welcomes this accidental windfall in the midst of the winter, and is soon busy packing the crowd of visitors into every nook and corner of the inn. We see him in the grey light of a December afternoon, by the eye of our imagination, rushing about in his premises finding accommodation for man and beast, bowing before the rich man with his train of servants and giving but scant attention to the poorer wayfarers. As he stands at the gate of his caravanserai for a moment to survey the scene, he is accosted by a man who is palpably not blessed with this world's goods, and is accompanied by his wife seated on an ass. The host has little time to bandy words, and doubtless receives the traveller's request with ill-concealed scorn. It is no doubt true that he could with an effort find some corner for the two, but even so he has every expectation of filling it to better advantage if some belated but wealthier traveller arrives. It would, moreover, mean trouble and effort, and innkeepers in their times of harvest are sometimes apt to balance their usual subserviency by allowing themselves an unwonted arrogance. Moreover, our life is built up of little acts, and if we have never been

considerate to the poor there is no reason to make an exception. He therefore told them there was no room and bade them begone. Having thus got rid of them, he gave no further thought to the matter. He had plenty to think of, and no light task in providing food, fuel and water for his customers. We picture him as he goes to sleep that night, his mind full of thoughts of how much he had done, of how much money he had made, and of all the talk he had heard. And here it is useful to stop for a moment and compare that man's estimate of his position and possessions at the moment with the truth as the passing of time has revealed it. Had we questioned him he would probably have said with all sincerity that this was one of the lucky nights of his life, that he had made the most of his opportunities, and had benefited to the utmost by the chance which Providence had given him. Had we pressed him for a defence on more altruistic lines, he would doubtless have argued with a show of reason that if there were any question of doing his duty to others and to the world at large, he had done his share in helping the general welfare by providing hospitality for so many. He could have made out for himself the same reasonable and apparently sound position that any very busy and active person in the world or the Church could make out for himself to-day, if he were asked to defend his way of living.

Yet if we turn to the truth as it has been revealed by passing time, his whole estimate is turned upside down in the most tragic manner. It was, as a matter of fact, the most unfortunate night of his life; he had lost the greatest opportunity man ever had, he had failed to grasp the chance which Providence offered. So far from

helping others and the world by his hospitality, he had won for himself the eternal title of the Inhospitable Host, and had done his best to deprive the world of its greatest Good. While he slept, immersed in dreams of gain and activity, outside in the little cave, lit by the dim light of the flaring earthenware lamp, in the presence of the lowly ox and the humble ass, the greatest miracle of all eternity was taking place. He had but to rise and look out into the night to see the majesty of the choir of angels filling the sky. Close to him the infinite Humility of God was being manifested; very nigh to his house at that moment the Word became flesh—and this man slept.

The innkeeper of Bethlehem was of use to the world after all, but in the way which he would least have chosen. By his own act and choice he became a lesson and a warning to all who came after. Did his spirit rise each Christmas Eve to stand before men he might, with ghostly voice, defend himself, saying: "I had to do my work, for it was the most important thing for myself and for others," and the world as it considered his case would have to reply: "This then you have for ever proved, that your work is not the most important thing for you or for the world."

Because this man thought that the business of life, the claims of his livelihood, the needs of his hostelry were the most important things in life, he lost the greatest chance ever offered to mortal man, the chance of being host and protector of the Son of God.

It does not seem that this is a lesson without application in any life, certainly not in any life bred up in those ideals of duty and work which belong to our nation. The trend of life is towards ever greater activity, the

pressure of the world's opinion is continually acting on us and impressing the importance of our daily labours and business. We need to look at the warning example of how much a man may lose if he drifts into regarding his work as the most important thing in life. The temptation comes to us in many specious forms, and none is perhaps more hard to resist than that half-truth which says that we are working for God, and therefore work is as good as prayer. There was once a great merchant who had a dearly loved son. No pleasure on earth was so great to him as his son's company. If his son were with him the world seemed full of sunshine, and if his son were absent the sky seemed grey. As his son grew up he took him into his business and the youth quickly became absorbed in it. Longer and longer the son spent in his father's office, and at last he would work there till ten each night, and if he thought of his father he would comfort himself with the reflection that at any rate he was working for his father's benefit and spending his time for his honour. Meanwhile the father sat at home, longing for the sight of his son and refusing to be comforted in his absence.

So is it with the soul who puts God's work before God's company. There is nothing so important in the world as being in God's company, and that is what we call prayer. If ever we let God's work oust prayer from our lives we miss the opportunity of ourselves receiving the greatest benefit, and, more important still, of helping others and the world at large.

The Lord Jesus comes often knocking at the door of souls seeking shelter, and they are too busy to let Him in. How often has it happened in our lives that He might have drawn us into a deeper consciousness of

His Presence if we had kept our prayer-life alive and strong, and because we had put our work and business before it when He came, we were not able to receive Him.

Innkeepers are we, each offering the shelter of love and help to others and to the world, but if we are absorbed in this alone we shall fill our inns and have no corner to offer to the Incarnate Word when He comes. And every inn is visited by Him.

## XI

### OF DISCIPLINE ON THE WAY

#### (i) PURIFICATION

It is often a cause of regret to souls that they are most aware of the sympathy of Christ when apparently they need it least. In moments when the inner light shines most brightly and the consciousness of our Lord's Presence is most clear, the soul is allowed to feel the intense pity and fellow-feeling of the Saviour, whereas when darkness descends on the soul, and all its faculties are numbed, it cannot be fully conscious of that sympathy which would so greatly assist it. It is for such times of dullness or darkness that our Lord left on record the message which He gave to comfort His disciples. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."

1. *Nevertheless*.—In this word our dear Lord sets forth the knowledge which He had gained by His own Incarnation. He foresees and acknowledges that it will be very difficult for us to come to Him, that we shall have much reason for doubt and distress on our journey, and that the obstacles will seem to us enormous. By this word He accepts all that we are tempted to say to Him in times of depression, when our failure seems manifest and our hope is dim. Two obvious causes

there are which account for all this difficulty: the first is that barrier of self-love which is set up in our lives betwixt our souls and God, and the second is the purification of that self-love with all the suffering and humiliation which it entails. The further we explore the dim territory of our own motives and thoughts, the more we are aware of the gigantic and far-reaching forces of selfishness and self-love constantly at work within us. The greater our experience of what it means to endeavour to live a spiritual life, the better we comprehend the extent of the suffering and pain which is required by the process of purification.

Yet this word "nevertheless" should assure us that these two causes of our difficulty are fully understood by our Lord and constantly in His mind. It is not hard to see how in His Incarnate life He gained this knowledge. The Temptation in the wilderness was no mere form or symbol; it was a real temptation, and in it He felt and faced the full attraction of self and conquered it. Thereafter He understood and understands what selfishness means to us and how awful is the pressure which it exerts. Likewise in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross He felt all the pain and anguish of purification, for in that great purification of the self-love of the world He entered into the agony of every degree of purification from the least to the greatest. The experience of our dear Lord makes certain that we have no moment of depression, darkness, or crucifixion which is not a part of Himself.

I see further in this word not only an acknowledgment of our difficulties, but also an appeal. He, who has the right to command, appeals. He asks us, standing side by side with Him, facing the difficulties which He

fully measures, to trust still the truth He tells us: "I tell you the truth." "In spite of these terrible difficulties, in spite of the suffering," He says, "believe that what I say to you is the truth."

Could God have ever twined a stronger rope to draw the soul of man than this appeal of sympathy? It calls forth all that is best and noblest in man and woman, an answer, not forced by fear or duty, but freely given with open eyes to One who understands, and understanding still asks.

And if you would endeavour to copy the sympathy of Christ in your own life and in your dealings with others, you will notice that in the first place it means that you must fully and truly try to comprehend the difficulties and sufferings of others from your own experience. You must not judge them from outside but from inside. You must find the nearest thing in your own life to those difficulties or sufferings and judge of them by it.

Further, if you would help others by your sympathy, it must find expression in an appeal and not in a command. However clearly you may see the way which they ought to follow, you must draw them and not force them to it.

2. *It is Expedient.*—Love is the only expediency that is known to our Lord. He must leave us, or appear to leave us, for a time, for otherwise we should not grow. To the enlightened soul in glory we must appear to be a race of spiritual slugs, so slow are we in all our movements towards God. What an amount of argument is required, how many pros and cons must be weighed, before we can make up our minds to take any spiritual step. If there is no lure to entice us onward we are content to stand still. It is the disappearing figure of our ascending



Lord, vanishing from our sight, which draws us from the apathy of our life. This is the meaning of the fact that always on the Way there is dullness or darkness at some period. Think not for a moment that it is easy for our Lord to withdraw Himself from our consciousness. He who delights in our happiness, who desires our joy far more than the fondest mother ever desired the joy of her children, must feel keenly the depression and heaviness which fall upon us in His absence. His love costs Him more than it costs us. Yet it is the only way. Were the spiritual life easy, and the consciousness of His Presence ever with us, we should be content to make little effort, blind to the self-love in ourselves, and perhaps even proud of our spiritual state. It is a hard saying but a true one, that the goad wherewith our Lord pricked St. Paul is the only instrument which will drive souls to God.

See then the sympathy of the Lord Jesus in action. Its action is costly to Him, nor could it have value if it did not cost much. It is costly for us because we are so slow and sluggish. Yet it is the only way that Love can find, and therefore it is expedient. So too in the sympathy by which we try to reflect the image of Christ before the world. We may be sure that it is no true reflection unless it is costly. It must demand even when the demand is painful. Sympathy which is easy to give can never be the reflection of Christ's sympathy. And always behind our sympathy, guiding and controlling it, must be the question, "What is expedient?"

3. *The Comforter*.—Neither in Nature is there a vacuum nor in God a void. That which is taken away must be replaced. Without the withdrawal of our Lord's Presence from our consciousness we should never be

aware of the sustaining comfort of God the Holy Ghost. The lure of Christ's love drawing us is not sufficient without the power of the Holy Spirit pushing us. It is the will of the Holy Spirit ever to push souls into God through the Incarnate Lord, and it is expedient that our Lord should appear to withdraw Himself that the will of God the Holy Ghost may be accomplished. "For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." It is the condition of our consciousness of the working of the Holy Spirit that we should lose at times our consciousness of the Presence of our dear Lord.

Is not this a fact in our spiritual experience? Is it not when we are in times of dullness and darkness that we are most conscious of being sustained by supernatural grace? At such times left to ourselves we should in our despair fall away, cease to keep our Rule of Prayer, rebel or give up, but instead some power which we feel, but often fail to recognise, keeps us constant, enables us to give the time to prayer, and day by day maintains us on the Way. This is the result of the sympathy of Christ. If the nature of that sympathy be a full fellow-feeling, if its method be the costly one of finding and doing that which is expedient, its result is always the introduction of a new force of grace into our lives.

So also shall it be when we reflect the sympathy of Christ, for our sympathy will bring as its result a new force and strength to those with whom we sympathise. The life which is not ours, but placed in us, will go out to be a strength for the weak and the needy.

By the sympathy of Christ our Lord we have received endless succour and comfort; let us therefore give as we have received, freely.

## (ii) DARKNESS

*"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered thee, O Sion."* This is the tragedy which at some time or another every soul who desires God finds in its own life. Heaven is not far from us or from our experience; and that mystical city of union, Jerusalem, which is its centre, has left a memory in the depths of our being. Our personality, that which separates us from all other living beings, is the result of the intensely personal and individual love which our Lord gives to each one of us. That love is therefore an experience in the unconscious depths of each human being. The origin of our personality lies in Jerusalem, and therefore in each soul is the rudimentary instinct of seeking a Motherland which is not here. As the soul grows in prayer and worship this instinct develops and increases, the consciousness of our true home grows in us and, by the grace of God, we see it perchance from a distance. If any messenger brings us news of it the thrill of desire rises afresh in us. Then comes the day when we come to the knowledge of our condition. We are in a beautiful country, but we would give it all for one of the stones of our homeland. The stream of our daily life rushes by with many a sparkle of friendship or achievement, brightened by the same sun which shines over our distant home, shaded by graceful foliage of duty or pleasure; but deep within us is the conviction that all its joys and glories are but shadows of the perfection that is in Sion. We are captives bound with many a chain of selfish desire; there seems to be no chance of escape; the way to our abiding city is long and hard. In such a moment that bright memory of the splendour

and glory of Jerusalem brings no joy or pride. The soul, solitary and forlorn, gives itself up to mourning. *We sat down and wept when we remembered thee, O Sion.* To the soul in spiritual darkness, when prayer has become hard and cold, when every spiritual effort is clogged with distaste, the bitterness of the contrast seems more than it can endure. Once it could commune with God, the end of its calling seemed certain, and each day seemed to bring it nearer. Now the light has faded and the very memory of its joy seems a mockery to the soul, fettered and in prison, beside the waters of Babylon.

*"As for our harps, we hanged them up upon the trees that are therein."* It is a common opinion among the greatest thinkers that music is the most spiritual of all arts. Among the exiles of Babylon the harp was the most perfect of musical instruments. It is therefore a fitting symbol, for the soul, of prayer and praise. The common taunt that we shall spend our existence in heaven playing on golden harps has no bitterness for the soul who has once tasted the joy of true communion in prayer and the fullness of adoration in worship. Yet there comes a time in the tragedy of the soul when the consciousness of its exile is upon it, when prayer and worship are distasteful and seem to be an empty hypocrisy. It is tempted in its heaviness to lay them aside. It is not through any lack of belief in prayer and praise, but because it cannot accomplish what it desires. It is too conscious of the perfection of the music in the Temple at Sion, and the contrast of its own state and of its own impotence leads it to despair. In the spiritual life there are many trees which shade the soul from the full light of the sun. They are needful, many of them are beautiful, and some

are harmful. They are the activities of human life, the duties, pleasures and distractions of daily existence. In these moments of depression, when Jerusalem seems to be farther away than it really is, the soul is tempted to hang up its prayer and praise amid the duties and pleasures of life. It seems a fitting place, for these duties and pleasures offer themselves most pressingly, they force themselves on our attention. So the soul, in the consciousness of its exile, gives up that which most nearly recalls to it the Motherland from which it came.

*“For they that led us away captive required of us then a song, and melody, in our heaviness: Sing us one of the songs of Sion.”* It is during those periods in the spiritual life when depression and darkness hold full sway that the influence of outward things is most used by God. When the soul can hear nothing and see nothing within itself, God sends His message through exterior means. This is not the least of the reasons which have led all the great mystics to declare that souls who follow the way of mystical prayer must live under direction. Many of these exterior messages come through the circumstances of daily life. It may be that our duties or pleasures bring us in contact with other souls who are seeking for something. The good news of Christ has an immense fascination for the world, and life is full of chance encounters with those who are looking for an abiding city. Even those who are most immersed in material things are attracted by true spiritual experience. Again, exterior calls come to us from our environment. Some happening, some scene, or some chance word becomes a picture of heavenly things and calls us imperatively to remember our birthright and the proud titles which we bear. We are

not allowed to forget for long that we are children of God, members of Christ, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. In all these ways the soul, in the midst of darkness and depression, is recalled to the thought of its origin and of its end, and is drawn towards that effort of prayer and praise which is so hard. And this drawing does not fail, for the songs of Sion are native to the soul and are part of its inheritance.

*"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"*

This must always be the first question of a soul in darkness when it feels the pressure of the need to pray and to worship. Every spiritual power is dormant, every moment which is set aside for devotion becomes the prey of distracting thoughts. It is a strange land, a land of unknown causes and of new experiences. The old well-worn paths of prayer lead into the desert, and every landmark is obliterated. The words which once opened the way into real prayer are now dead and useless, the liturgy which stirred and roused all our highest spiritual powers seems to be in a foreign language. Amid such surroundings the soul feels there must be some new way if only it could be found, some spiritual appliance which could raise it up again. Alas! search as it may among the novelties of devotion, it will find nothing that can accomplish its purpose. At last it is forced to answer its own question and to find the only way left open to it.

#### THE SONG OF THE SOUL

*"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand forget her cunning.  
If I do not remember thee,  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth :  
Yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem  
In my mirth."*

The only way left open to the soul is to send forth to God its blind desire and its steadfast will. No warmth of feeling, no fierce love, no ardent longing can come from it, but only a persistent retention of its purpose and of its conviction. Such is the prayer and praise which the soul must offer up in darkness. It is enough, yes, more than enough, for God knows what the soul can never know, that in the depths of its being there must be a very fire of desire to force this song from its lips. Such is the prayer of darkness, more pleasing in God's sight than those prayers which we hold in such high esteem. Again and again the soul repeats its firm conviction that it has but one home and one Motherland, that nothing can satisfy its desires and its longing save the streets of Jerusalem.

And shall we not desire thee, O Jerusalem? Groping and wandering through doubts and fears, shall we not long for the perfect light of the Godhead, wherein by a single instantaneous sight all knowledge is understood? Beset by desires which we hate, dividing our love among many objects, shall we not hope for that moment when the fullness of the Love of Jesus, shining upon us, shall draw us irresistibly into Himself, our only Home?

Let us then, if we be exiles in darkness and depression, set our faces toward our Home, and go forward on our way repeating the watchword of the Pilgrim: "I am nothing, I have nothing, I desire nothing save the Love of Jesus, and I would fain be at Jerusalem."

## XII

### OF COURAGE ON THE WAY

It is a good custom, on the eves of the Saints' days, which are printed in black letters in the Prayer-book Calendar, to read over the biographies of those who are commemorated; for it not only brings reality into this long-neglected part of the Prayer-book, but it also gives us some insight into those characteristics which mark souls who have gained a close and conscious contact with God. In reading these biographies one cannot help but be struck by one feature which seems common to most of the stories of the martyrs. They seem to have been able, at the very crisis of their sufferings, to produce some epigrammatic remark which, while devoid of all bitterness, showed an unshaken constancy and conviction and was calculated by its very form, sometimes tinged with humour, to remain in the mind of all that heard it. St. Lawrence, the Archdeacon of Rome, ordered by the rapacious authorities of the city to produce the treasures of the Church, collects a crowd of beggars and cripples before the court and informs the infuriated magistrates that these are the treasures of the Church. It is the same Saint who, while he is being burnt, imperturbably bids his executioners, "Turn me, for I am done on this side." St. Ignatius at the moment when he is thrown to the wild beasts cries out, "I am



the corn of God and am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread." St. Polycarp, ordered by the proconsul to revile Christ, replies, " Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me any wrong." St. Agnes, urged to recant by the Prefect on the ground that she is only a child, answers, " I may be a child, but faith is not measured in years but in love." St. Lucian, left to starve to death after being tortured, finds himself in a bare and filthy cell, and being unable to stand or sit he uses his body as an altar. Calling his companions round him for a farewell Eucharist he says to them, " This breast of mine shall be the altar, and ye shall be a holy temple standing round about me."

All these cases are but illustrations of the fact that one great and prominent mark of the soul who is drawing near to God is a courage almost gay, devoid of bitterness or complaint, forgetful of self and quite calm. It is a courage which appears at its best amid the stress of suffering, which knows no panic and inspires the mind.

The Saints of old were given to the world by God not only to impress the onlookers who witnessed their sufferings, but also to teach those who came after them, following, however humbly, the road they took. It is for this reason that their names still abide with us and are still borne by multitudes, while names accounted great in history have died out. There are few Napoleons among the children of the world compared to the crowd who own the name of Agnes.

It is well, therefore, that we should turn our attention to this particular trait, this gay courage in the face of trial and suffering which marked the Saints, and try to apply it to our own lives.

It is an axiom that they who would be near Christ must walk in the road He walked. That road infallibly brings trial and suffering. It is absolutely beyond human power to measure that suffering, or to compare the suffering of one individual with the suffering of another. Suffering acts on a human being through the nerves. It is useless to try to estimate it by exterior circumstances, for it is the condition of the individual nervous system which is a determining factor of the degree of suffering inflicted. It is owing to this truth that we are able to use the apparently extraordinary sufferings of the martyrs as applicable to the ordinary life of a Christian. Each soul who would touch the living Christ must undergo his own martyrdom. As we look at the Saints we see that they were able at the crisis of their sufferings to call up from the depth of their beings some mysterious source of strength. There is in us, as there was in them, a deep and spiritual element which can, if it be developed, dominate all the other elements of our humanity. It is just this quality of the soul which they used and which we are called upon to educate if we would follow in their steps and use the rich treasure of our suffering to draw nearer to our Lord.

The source of this deep spiritual element is undoubtedly a great and abiding trust not only in the mercy of God but also in His power. It did not spring up in full force in the souls of the Saints. They had laboured long and arduously to train it. Day by day in the small things of life they had used it. By constant acts of remembrance they had learnt to be aware of the continual Presence of Christ in daily life. By bringing all the small decisions of their ordinary existence to Him for solution, they had grown accustomed to

depending on His decision and guidance. Above all, in all moments of weakness or trial they had formed the habit of seeking immediate strength from Him. It was this constant practice of trust which enabled them to be ready for the crisis when it came. Many who read these words can look back to some period in their lives which was marked by real suffering, perhaps not visible to the world, but not the less real on that account. It is instructive to see in what spirit we met such periods. There must of necessity have been a shrinking from the suffering at first, but was this followed by courage or complaint? The weak soul reacts to suffering by an increase of selfishness, pouring out complaints, seeking sympathy on every side save the one which alone can help, and striving by centring all efforts on self to alleviate the trial. To such a soul there speedily comes the point of collapse when everything is blamed, but especially God. The poor weak trust, untrained and unprepared, is found to be a foundation of sand, and the soul which talked so bravely of the Cross of Christ turns with loathing from its very shadow.

It is far otherwise with the soul which has steadfastly developed its treasure of Trust. The approach of suffering finds such a soul shrinking but determined, with lips tight closed and clear sight; the courageous soul renews all those practices which day by day it has followed. It reiterates again and again the protestation of its belief in the power and mercy of God. It increases its discipline of self-love, finds more opportunity of serving others, and speaks of everything save self. In the hour of crisis, with wisdom born of many a little struggle, it turns to Christ and seeks intensely from Him strength to face the pain. This is the secret of the martyrs, a

secret useless without the preliminary training and discipline of trust, but when that has been undergone, a secret omnipotent to conquer all earthly and human powers. To such a soul in its moment of crisis Christ bends down from heaven; on its hands and feet He lays His own, and from the wounds there flows afresh the blood of His life into the suffering soul. Then comes the transformation which astounds the world. The stricken soul in the midst of its agony finds the bliss of joy, in the depths of its weakness finds a super-human strength, in the centre of its darkness and fog a bright and shining light. No wonder that the martyrs' lips could astonish the world. It was no pose; they were being exceedingly natural, speaking just the things which they felt, manifesting the spirit which filled them.

Think not to yourself that the martyrs are dead and that you at least will have no place in any calendar of saints. The martyrs are alive in heaven and on earth, and the eternal calendar of Saints has a blank space which only you can fill or leave empty. Whether you will accept it or not, if you have once determined to follow Christ, martyrdom awaits you. Far better then that you take the way of training now. Day by day educate your trust in God. Let Him decide your choices, let His company be ever with you, let His life be your support in all small trials. It means drudgery and discipline to accomplish this education. Remember that the education of the Saints was through drudgery and discipline.

### XIII

#### OF JOY ON THE WAY

THERE was a poor man who was poor indeed, for that he had no treasure laid up in heaven, and being clothed in rags, grievously stained and rent in many places, he was an object of compassion to the blessed company of Saints. Having, therefore, little reason to rejoice in his soul, he betook himself to the contemplation of the great joy which is to be found in the King of Heaven, Jesus Christ.

Then he saw that it is from this joy as from an eternal fountain that all earthly joy is replenished, so that never a babe is full of happiness, nor any human creature rejoices in life or happiness, but that the joy flows from this same fountain. Also he saw that this joy is the happiness of heaven, for all men declare that to attain to heaven is the greatest happiness, yet heaven is only happy for that the joy of its Master fills it.

After this he considered wherefore the Lord who is called the Lord Beloved should be so joyful, and first he saw that He was full of joy for the work of redemption. Poor souls are caught in the great net of redemption, and as a fisherman rejoices to see the fullness of his net as he draws it from the water, so the Lord Jesus beheld the souls beyond all multitudes in number withdrawn from the sea of destruction.

Secondly, he saw that the Divine Lord was full of joy because He was full of Life Eternal, perpetually replenished in His everlasting generation of the Father and perpetually poured forth in the procession of the Holy Spirit. Now this Life, with its ceaseless flow of energy, contained in itself the essence of joy, for none could receive even the least tincture thereof without being filled with a great happiness.

Thirdly, it was made known to him that the Divine King was eternally joyful by reason of the greatness of His Love. For on earth great love oft-times means great sorrow, but in heaven, where the end of all things is seen at the same time as the beginning, it is but the occasion of rejoicing, for all love attaineth victory, and in the Presence of the Lord the trumpet call which calleth Love to battle is one with the fanfare which proclaims its conquest.

For these three reasons the most perfect King and Lord is eternally filled and overflowing with joy.

Then this poor man questioned himself, saying, "How might a soul enter into the joy of his Lord?" and presently he sighed with a grievous sigh, "Oh, that I might know it," and again, "I cannot live longer without it;" and this was the first step of the way which leads to this joy.

And next he said within himself, "If I might but touch the hem of His garment," and with this intent he set himself to crawl along the road along which his Lord should pass, that he might set himself in a favourable place; and this was the second step which leads to this joy.

Then anon when he heard the distant sound of the coming of the Master he was feared lest he should be

passed by, but for all that he did not move, but abode where he was, thinking within himself, "If it be His Will," and "He knoweth all things;" and this was the third step.

Thus ever does a soul enter into the joy of the Lord—first by desire, and then by following, and then by waiting in trust.

And at last the Lord Jesus came by that way, and seeing a poor man clad in rags, and having ever a special compassion for beggars, He touched him with His Royal hand. Then there flowed into that soul such joy as is too deep for any words, so that it was altogether inebriated and foolish, and began to say, "Oh, Lord Jesus, my only Lord, I would have Thee for my very own, not for what men say of Thee, but for Thine own Perfection, and I cannot live away from Thee any more. I would be a grain of dust under Thy footstool so that I might ever be near Thee. Thou art my only love and treasure, and having Thee I should be no longer poor." Then the Lord Jesus, by reason of the very great love He had to the poor man, passed on, lest the beggar's head should be turned by reason of the joy, and also that He might entice the poor man to follow Him to a better place. Nevertheless, the joy which flowed from His touch remained with the poor man, and that was the alms which the Lord Jesus gave him.

This is the telling of the joy of the Lord Jesus. Wherefore I beseech all, who shall at any time read what is here written, that they follow that same path in the likeness of beggars, and wait thereon until such time as the Lord Jesus shall pass their way.

## XIV

### OF PRAYER ON THE WAY

#### (i) OF INTERCESSION

“AND Elijah went up to the top of Carmel.” The quality by which Truth is always to be tested is Growth. The answer which drives out of court all the solutions which science and philosophy offer as final solutions of the riddle of the universe is that they claim to be complete. The Anti-Christ is always to be detected by the cry of “Lo here,” or “Lo there,” since there is neither “here” nor “there” in infinity. All true spiritual activity is therefore marked by progress, and grows and deepens with progress. In this study of intercession, founded on the example of Elijah, the first fact to be noted is that Elijah’s intercession began with a long and toilsome climb. The natural man doubtless sought the mountain-top to escape from the noise and distraction of the maddened multitude beside the brook Kishon, and no less to escape from all the suggestions of power and mastery which radiated from the rough stone altar on the plain. But the *soul* of the prophet was impelled by motives not peculiar to the moment, but known to the Saints in all ages. It was urged on by the desire to ascend, through toil and effort, to the highest point, and the urgency was so strong within, that it forced itself outwards and demanded to be translated into visible form. It is the first law of inter-



cession that the soul should strive to prepare itself for its high activity. This preparation always involves a long and arduous climb. The first stage is to hurry away from the clamours of wandering thoughts, the presence of the multitude of daily activities and work. Then, breathless to climb those slippery slopes where selfish desires continually strive to drag the soul downwards to a lower level; till at last, amid the boulders of the consciousness of sin, and the thin mists of scruples and false suggestions and fears, the top is sighted, and the soul emerges to find itself alone with God.

“And he cast himself down upon the earth.” The body, worn by the long climb, automatically sought relief. The soul, by the merciful operation of God’s law, seeks rest in humility. The hard struggle has served to show its weakness and its frailty, and now it has no resource save humility. In humility it finds true peace, security from all attacks, quietude and rest. This is the secret of spiritual recuperation. If we would but make trial of it more often, the struggles of the soul would be shorter and less fatiguing. Such is the second law of intercession. The soul who would intercede must have a space of true humility to make ready for its effort. Herein is provided the strength which compels even God, which draws the intent gaze of the Father’s love upon the poor publican, while the Pharisee abides in his darkness. Nor is it unworthy of note, that the prophet “cast himself” upon the ground. There is a certain vehemence which is necessary to humility. We can lower ourselves by the aid of many excuses quite easily. True humility revolts against such expedients, and thrusting aside all excuses, casts itself, in the fervour of a clear sight, upon the hard ground of a true

repentance. Let none think that their intercessions have strength to mount to God unless they start from the dust of humility.

“And he put his face between his knees.” Soul and body united by God compel each other. In all ages the instinct of the soul has forced the body to lower the head as a sign of worship. It were impossible that the second law of intercession should not be followed by the third. Humility which does not lead to worship is false and barren. He who intercedes must first worship. No soul can become aware of its own insignificance and worthlessness without seeking refuge in the infinite glory of God. Seeing itself one blackened grain of sand in the desert of the universe, it glorifies and adores the sun of God’s love which alone gives it light and beauty. This recognition of God, this ardour for God’s glory and its increase is the one activity of the soul which is pure from all selfishness. Therefore above all other activities it is the most fitting introduction to intercession.

“And he said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea.” So at last the intercession begins. There is sent forth from the soul the urgent desire. Into the immense ocean of God’s love the spiritual gaze is directed, knowing that therein is contained all wisdom, power, and might; hoping that from it may emerge that which seems best to poor human understanding. It is well to note that Elijah’s hope was founded on an interior message which he had received from God, and on his exterior knowledge of the needs of the nation. Our intercessions are best founded, where God allows it, on such a double basis. In intercession it frequently happens that God makes plain to the soul that which it should seek, and

that such knowledge is confirmed by its own observation. Elijah sent his servant. It is a real effort of the will which impels desire to God, but that effort is, in true intercession, no great fatigue because the desire is the servant of the soul. Only when intercession is selfish is the desire the master of the soul, and only then does it wear out soul and body. The fourth law of intercession requires that he who intercedes shall send forth to God his desire.

“And he said, Go again seven times.” Did the prophet know that a greater than he would one day tell the story of a widow and an unjust judge to the confusion of those who had little experience of intercession? He knew, at any rate, the lesson of all spiritual experience—that God answers prayers in such a manner as shall most benefit him who prays. He too had played with God that wonderful “*ludus amoris*,” wherein the soul is a ball tossed up and down. What is more beautiful in the sight of God than human trust, and how can human trust grow save by the necessity of using it? Elijah will go unrewarded if, out of the western sky, the cloud, like a man’s hand, shall come in answer to his first prayer. But at the seventh time, when his faith, tried and tested, glows like a flame in God’s sight, then he shall have his answer, and he shall have received a greater gift than the multitude below, who watch their parched earth grow fruitful under the showers of rain. This is the last law, that in intercession Trust is demanded and increased.

There are many hills on the Way to God, and each of them offers to the soul a place for intercession. The nations of the earth wait in despair for the refreshing rain of God’s grace, and great is the necessity for souls

who will climb to the mountain top, and there, bent low in the dust of humility, and prepared by true worship, will send forth to the Eternal Father that oft-repeated cry for help and healing which alone can succour the sorrows of the world.

## (ii) OF MEDITATION

It is remarkable how much of that which we hold to be secret and impenetrable in ourselves is really open and visible to the eyes of men. There is no one of us who does not reveal far more than he knows to the world around him. If we sit opposite another person in a railway carriage we find ourselves trying to decipher the thoughts which are passing through his mind or the character concealed by his face, and very often a chance glance or a slight action will unveil the man's motive and personality in a way which would shock and surprise him if he knew of it. Nevertheless there are many occasions when such penetration is impossible. We enter, perhaps, a church and see a person kneeling there in prayer. If we ask ourselves the nature of the prayer going forth from that enigmatic figure we can give no reply, it would seem totally impossible even to guess at the thoughts and aspirations of the man or woman lost in prayer.

Yet I am going now to invite you to assist me in this very quest, and to attempt with me to explore the inmost devotions of a man lost in prayer. To find the man you must leave the deserts beyond Jordan and take the road to Galilee, which runs past the village of Bethel. Near this historic village is a notable fig tree, remarkable for its size and the shade it spreads. Beneath this fig tree, a scroll of the Scriptures beside him, lost in prayer

and meditation and oblivious of all save his communion with God, is to be seen the man whose thoughts we seek to explore. His name is Nathanael Bartholomew, Nathanael being the personal name and the equivalent of our Theodore, and Bartholomew being his surname. He is a man of moderate ability, for when his name is enrolled in the four-times repeated list of the Apostles, we find it always in the second of the three groups into which the list is divided, and those three groups represent apparently three circles among the Apostles, arranged according to ability and prominence. He is a man of warm affections and is able to inspire affection in others, for Philip, his friend, seeks him straightway when he has found the Christ, and desires to share his joy with him. He is also candid and fair-minded, for though he hails from Cana of Galilee, he is broad-minded enough to see the justice of the view which condemns his home province and inspires the doubt whether any good can come out of Nazareth.

What is this man praying about and whither has his meditation led him? I think we can almost conclusively trace the main lines of his prayer if we study the conversation which he held with our Lord immediately afterwards, for it is evident that in that conversation our Lord convinced him that he was face to face with the Christ by showing His knowledge of the secrets of Nathanael's prayer. Our first clue to the nature of the meditation is the weakest, but it adds greatly to the strength of the others. It is concerned with the locality in which the prayer took place. Our Lord had been with John the Baptist at Bethlehem on the Jordan, and was now on his first day's journey toward Galilee. He was therefore near Bethel and near the celebrated ford

of the Jordan. Nathanael had come down from Galilee, attracted by the reputation and preaching of John the Baptist, and was apparently staying in or near Bethel. Doubtless he would visit the celebrated and historic spots in the neighbourhood. Now Bethel and the ford of the Jordan were spots which owed their sanctity to the patriarch Jacob, and this was all Jacob's country. It would therefore be at the least likely that Bartholomew's thoughts and study should turn to the life of Jacob.

Our second indication is more conclusive, for when Bartholomew meets our Lord, Christ convinces him by his first remark that He has read the secrets of his mind. This first remark is a peculiar one: "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile!" It is peculiar in three points: it is the only occasion on which our Lord used the unusual term, Israelite; the expression, "no guile," is out of the ordinary, and seems pressed into use for some special purpose; and the remark seems utterly inadequate to call from Nathanael the startled cry, "Whence knowest Thou me?" Yet if we follow the line of our first clue the whole thing fits neatly into place. Jacob, the patriarch, at that very ford across the Jordan, had wrestled all night and by his faith had won a victory. In reward he had been given a new name. His name had been Jacob, which means "the supplanter," "the guileful one," but now it was changed to Israel, which means "the soldier of God."

So I trace the meditation of Bartholomew. Starting with the sacred hero of his faith and nation, whose life was enshrined in the view spread before him, he had thought of the great change and conversion which had come to him; a change which had made a true soldier

of God out of a guileful supplanter. Then, as we all do, he had applied the thought to his own life. Was such a change possible for him? Could he in one moment of faith shake off doubt and deceit and become a spiritual adventurer, a leader in God's battle? The answer came to him like a thunderclap as he stood before Christ and was told that he was a true soldier of God indeed, in whom there was left no guile.

But the third and last clue is convincing. Nathanael in answer to Christ's knowledge of his prayer and aspiration makes his confession of faith. "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel," and then Christ straightway tells him of his reward. What reward out of all the many will satisfy this man best? This promise of Christ and none other: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." So we know how the meditation of Bartholomew ended. He had passed on from the consideration of whether in one moment of faith his life could be changed, to think of the result of such a change. He had prayed that like Jacob he might be cleansed from all deceit and made a true soldier of God, and—what then? Why, what else, save that he might come to the reward of Jacob, that glorious ecstasy wherein the heavens opened to the eye of man and the angels in all their glory were seen ascending and descending upon God made manifest? So his prayer rose in fervour to God, as a million prayers have risen since. "Oh, that I might see the glory of the Lord, the face of God amid the company of heaven." And in a little space Bartholomew, happiest of all who have prayed that prayer, heard it answered by the most sure promise of the Son of God. Of the manner of that

answer we know nothing; whether he alone among the Apostles woke in Gethsemane and saw the angels ministering to Christ, or whether in distant India, where report says that he ended his ministry, he saw the heavens open above him, or whether he had to wait for death to enter on the beatific vision, we know not. This only is sure, that his meditation and his prayer found their answer in all its fullness, an answer which no human words could express or human minds fathom.

This is the one great historical incident of Nathanael Bartholomew's life which is recorded, and it seems designed to show and to teach the tremendous value and importance of one of the means of grace which is only too often neglected by Christians. How many of you use that method of devotion which is commonly called Meditation, and which is supposed to be an ordinary part of the spiritual life of every Christian? I fear that many members of our Church are totally untrained in this most necessary Christian exercise. So in honour of St. Bartholomew, who may well be termed the patron saint of meditation, I would ask you this day to consider what is the purpose of this devotional exercise and how it can be simply carried out.

In prayer we seek a twofold object. We want to express ourselves to God and we want God to impress Himself on us. In pursuit of the former we use intercession and petitions and worship, to gain the latter we have meditation and communion. Meditation, therefore, is one of the ways in which we seek to hear God's voice. No prayer-life can be very strong if it is confined to speaking to God, it will gradually wither and lose interest. We need to listen to God if we are to grow. In every one of us is implanted the desire for communica-

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tion with God, but if that communication is one-sided the desire will soon grow cold. Now when we try to listen to God we are confronted at once with a difficulty. We cannot keep our thoughts quiet, they go wandering away, leading us in all manner of directions, and distracting our attention so that the message of God falls unheeded on our ears. It is evident, then, that if we are to listen to God, our thoughts must first be chained to one spot, or, as it is more commonly said, that we must have concentration. Meditation provides the means for this, for in meditation the mind and attention are fixed on some passage of Scripture, as Bartholomew's mind was fixed on the life of Jacob. Being thus fixed it can readily receive any communication which God sends through that passage.

Further, the subject on which the mind is fixed is taken from Holy Scripture, and Holy Scripture is after all only the collection of the accounts of God's dealings with men and men's spiritual experience of God. It includes all the facts of God's communication of Himself. It is, therefore, most capable of containing and revealing the message of God to each individual soul. In this way meditation offers the readiest means of listening to God and hearing His personal message to our souls. And now I would put before you a simple method of meditation which anyone can use. I think one of the reasons why meditation has been so much neglected is, that the methods set forth in manuals of devotion are often so complicated and confused that the boldest soul shrinks from attempting them. Such complication is unnecessary, for the simpler the method the better it will accomplish its purpose.

You must first set aside a time for this exercise, and it

need not be very long—anything from ten minutes to half-an-hour will suffice. When you have got your time, choose the verse or passage of Scripture on which you will meditate. If you have any difficulty in deciding on one, you can take a passage from the Gospel for the week or from the lesson for the day. Next follows a very important step, the step on which all the rest depends. You must pray to God the Holy-Ghost to bring you into the Presence of our Lord, so that He may speak to you. This prayer is never left unanswered, and so the soul need not struggle or worry, but can rest content in the conviction that it is kneeling indeed before our Lord, who desires to speak to it. Then, in Christ's Presence, read over the verse or passage and ask Him to show you its meaning. You will find that if you wait a little while, some meaning and probably some application to your own life will come to you. It will come through your own mind, for you are offering your mind to our Lord as an instrument on which He can play. There are many hundreds of meanings to the verse or passage, but our Lord will choose out the one which He wishes to convey to you, and will cause your mind to receive it. In this way you will receive a personal and special message from Him. And after receiving it you must try and carry it out. Very often indeed you will find that the message has reference to something which you can do, and so your meditation will end in a resolution.

There are many souls who learn to meditate in this way, but those who receive its real benefit are those who persevere. Too often souls get tired of the attempt, and after the first enterprise give up trying to listen to the voice of our Lord. How great is their loss, how many loving words fall on their deaf ears, how often

their love grows cold for lack of the sustenance they could receive if they would.

But for those souls who persevere there is a glorious reward. Many a soul which began its meditation on earth has ended it in heaven, as was the case with St. Bartholomew.

There is an ancient Jewish legend which tells how Solomon, after he had fallen into sin and idolatry, came on a day to clear sight and said within himself, "Many people will lose their faith in God through my books, for they will say, 'Why did he, with so much wisdom, turn away from the Lord, if it is good to worship Him?' " Thereupon he ordered his servants to collect the books in which he had written his thoughts and meditations on God and to burn them. The servants were grieved, and having consulted pretended to do his will, but did not burn the books. When they came back, he asked them, "What have ye seen?" They said, "We have seen nothing." Then the king was angered, and commanded them once more to burn the books. And when they returned they told him that at the burning of the books the room was filled with light and glory, which, being concentrated and gathered together, presently went up as it were a dove into heaven. The meditations of Solomon are no rare exception, for it has happened to many souls that as they listened to the voice of our Lord their thoughts and prayers became suddenly concentrated and were carried up as it were a dove into heaven. Then have they been privileged to know for a passing instant that glory where angels ascend and descend before the Lord of Love, and have been filled with a longing, which cannot fade, to themselves enter into that life and there abide for ever.

## (iii) OF STILLNESS

Our knowledge of God has come to us through revelation and our own experience. The greater part of that revelation we owe to the personal knowledge of our Lord, the other part to the experience of holy men of old in prayer. The older we grow in the spiritual life the more certain we become that all past human experience of God can be recaptured and relived. In this belief we scan with careful eyes the records of the prophets, the lives of the Saints, and the Services of the Church, seeking to find therein traces of that which we have found in prayer. Thus we build more surely the shrine of the knowledge of God within our souls.

Among the marks of God which appear in the experiences of holy men of old we notice the ascription to Him of stillness and silence. Elijah the prophet stands before the cave and knows God in a still small voice. Eliphaz the Temanite, in the vision of the night, notes the stillness of the Spirit which overshadows him. The Psalmist in various places refers to the stillness which accompanies the Presence of God. There is a striking passage in the oldest of the apocryphal Gospels, the Protevangelium of James, which is usually dated early in the second century. This passage describes St. Joseph going forth from the cave at Bethlehem to look for assistance. At the moment when he comes forth, God the Son is born into this world in the Person of Jesus Christ. "I, Joseph, was walking and not walking; and I looked up into the sky and saw it standing, and the birds of the air keeping still. And I looked down upon the earth and saw work-people reclining, and those that were eating did not eat, and those that were rising did not

rise; but the faces of all were looking upwards. And I saw the sheep walking, and the sheep stood still; and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, and his hand remained raised. And I looked upon the current of the river, and I saw the mouths of the kids resting on the water and not drinking." Whoever wrote this description, and upon whatever tradition it is founded, there is behind it a very real spiritual experience—for the coming of God is always marked by a great stillness, a cessation of strife and noise and worry. To the soul in prayer it is the first sign of God's approach, the first intimation of a new degree of reality in its spiritual experience. The record of such a period of prayer begins with the struggle of the soul to concentrate its attention. The struggle is due to the irruption of distracting thoughts concerning work or pleasure. These thoughts continually capture the attention of the soul and as continually are dismissed. Then, almost unnoticed, the interest of the soul begins to be centred on God, and advantage is taken of this to pour out a stream of petitions, intercessions, or desires. An ever greater activity fills the soul in its endeavours to take advantage of this time of recollection. Just as this activity is at its highest point there falls upon the soul a cloud of stillness, as on some moor the traveller is suddenly surrounded by a cloud of mist which shuts out the sights and sounds which filled his consciousness a moment before. This stillness is the herald of the coming of our Lord in the soul, the counterpart of that great cloud which filled the Tabernacle or the Temple when God was made manifest upon the Mercy Seat. All that happens thereafter takes place in the midst of this stillness. It is for this reason that all our conscious communion

with God is so sane and free from excitement. We are guarded and cut off from the world by the cloud of the Shechinah.

The study of those marks and qualities which we find in God is one of the most practical studies in the world. The ideal of the Christian is to look on Christ and to reflect Him. It is from the study of what we have experienced in moments of conscious communion with God that we learn how to pray, for our prayer must be so ordered as to respond to the manifestation of God. If God comes to us by a certain road we must learn to travel that road to meet Him. Tauler in one of his works tries to describe this stillness of God. He says, "All there is so still and mysterious: for there is nothing there but God only, and nothing strange. This wilderness is the Quiet Desert of the Godhead, into which He leads all who are to receive this inspiration of God, now or in eternity." We must endeavour then to find the road in our prayer, which leads toward the Quiet Desert, for one must cross the Desert to reach Jerusalem.

In order to travel this road we must learn first to be quiet in our prayer. This is no easy task, nor one to be accomplished without much practice. It is a work of self-discipline, for the hindrances in prayer are caused by the irruption of thoughts, imaginations, and desires connected with our senses and our daily life in the world. Just as these have to be disciplined in outward things if we are to purge our outward actions of self-love, so must we bring them under control if we are to free our prayer of distraction. It is for this reason that the method of meditation is so strongly enforced, for this method, in an easy and natural way, helps us to centre

our attention on one point instead of on many. We must use our wills to call all our powers within ourselves, directing our thoughts, imaginations and desires, on God. Again and again we must recall them from wandering and bid them "Think on God; desire God; wait for God." We must be prepared to face almost endless repetition of this process, disregarding the boredom and ennui which come from an apparently hopeless process. Our journey to meet the Stillness of God is only accomplished when we have collected and centred all our thoughts, imaginations, and desires on God. Then comes the most difficult work of all. Being thus collected, we must wait. Having come to the trysting-place, it is ordained that we must abide there till He comes. All that we have collected into one, struggles to be free, and we must control it and hold it there. Our Lord desires the whole of our being for the purpose of communion with Him, and the whole of our being must be therefore held before Him in the attitude of waiting and expectation.

It is a hard process, yet well worth the struggle. St. Teresa vouches: "Support the pains which you first feel in doing this, despise the rebellion of nature, overcome the resistance of the body, which loves liberty, which is its ruin, learn self-conquest, persevere thus for a time and you will perceive very clearly the advantages which you gain from it; for at last, after many and many exercises of this kind, God disposes the soul to a state of absolute repose and of perfect contemplation."

To some souls there has come an apprehension lest in approaching the Stillness of God they may fall into the pit of Quietism. It is best, therefore, to set forth

the differences which separate this quiet prayer from Quietism. In Quietism the soul endeavours to reach the same goal by wrong means. Instead of collecting and directing on to one central point all its living powers, the soul endeavours to kill or to drug each of these powers. It brings to God a dead and not a living sacrifice. There is no endeavour to centre all attention, thought, and desire on God, but rather the attempt to kill attention, thought, and desire, so that they may be no more felt. This attempt, if successful, produces a state of passivity. It is easily known by two marks—the absence of any desire for God, and the loss of all sense of personality. The quiet prayer which goes out to meet the Stillness of God is not passive, because it is full of waiting and expectation. It is rather the culmination of energy where the divers parts of the machine, which before worked independently with much clamour, now work in perfect unity with silence and a vast increase of power.

We have great need to go forth to meet the Stillness of God. We desire, above all things, to enlarge the moments of conscious communion He has given us, and this is the way in which we can best prepare ourselves for progress. There is no rest in the world to be compared to the perfect rest of the Stillness of God, wherein the soul, bathing itself, receives restoration and energy to fight afresh.

It is always with a feeling of utter failure that one finishes any attempt to describe an experience of mystical prayer, and one turns with relief to the description of a master craftsman who set forth, in his greatest poem, the experience of going forth in silence to seek the Stillness of God.



" By night, secure from sight  
 And by a secret stair, disguisedly,  
 (O hapless, happy plight !)  
 I went, none seeing me,  
 Forth from my house, where all things quiet be.

Blest night of wandering  
 In secret, when by none might I be spied,  
 Nor I see any thing;  
 Without a light to guide.  
 Save that which in my heart burnt in my side.

That light did lead me on,  
 More surely than the shining of noontide.  
 Where well I knew that One  
 Did for my coming bide;  
 Where He abode might none but He abide."

#### (iv) OF VISION

The pain in life is due to contrast. Our bodily ailments are painful because of the contrast of the state which they produce with our normal state. Our mental pain comes from the contrast between the pictures of imagination or memory and the realisation of what is. Our spiritual pain arises from the contrast between what we have known in moments of reality and what we find in our present condition. Holy Scripture has enshrined this pain of contrast in one vivid episode which is worthy of consideration.

"Moses went up from the plains of Moab." Had there been no other message this pilgrimage was message enough. In his life the hills always stood for high adventure and awe-inspiring events, while the plains meant comfort and luxury. I do not picture him walking with even gait, but rather going now slowly and now fast, drawn one moment by desire and held the next by regret. A man's work is very dear to him; it amalgamates much that is high and unselfish with much that is not

so high. It may be God's work also, but to leave God's work to meet God must always be a struggle, and out of that struggle was born the proverb "Laborare est orare."

"Unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah." I see in these words a key to the right understanding of this episode. They tell how Moses went up to a certain summit called Nebo, the highest point in the range of hills called Pisgah. The startling fact is that there is no summit in that range of hills "over against Jericho." The range presents the appearance of a wall or cliff, the upper line of which is almost horizontal, "as if the hand of the painter who had traced this horizontal line against the sky had trembled in some places." There is no point in that range which gives a wider view than another save Nebo, and Nebo is not in this world, but in the world of reality, the eternal world. When Moses reached the top of the range of Pisgah he had not to go in search of Nebo, for Nebo came to him. As he walked along the top of that cliff there rose up under his feet Mount Nebo, and exalted him to a sphere where his view was bound by neither time nor space. To every soul who seeks there comes the exaltation of Mount Nebo, provided they have climbed the range of Pisgah. It is not by search or the study of maps that we find it, but rather by seeking and achieving the highest level of life which we can. While we are living that life day by day, patiently and quietly, we suddenly find ourselves exalted to a summit which we had never dreamed existed. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

"And the Lord showed him all the land unto the

utmost sea." Any wide view gives a sense of exhilaration and power; the moment we are physically above anything, we seem to control it and surpass it. Moses in that moment must have felt that he possessed all that he saw, and it had been his lifelong ambition to possess it. At the same moment he must have felt that he surpassed it and looked down upon it, that its possession had ceased to be of great value. I do not fancy he looked eagerly for this or that town or city, or searched for boundaries and frontiers. He was too high for such things, and knew that though they might be important in the plains of Moab, they had now lost their value. Had God allowed him to descend again into the plains they would have regained their value, but up at the summit he knew finally and for ever that that value, though it might be necessary, was not real. To every soul in the highest moments of prayer it is clear that the important things of daily life are not important. The higher we are lifted the more we become aware of our own nothingness, and therefore of the less than nothingness of the details of our daily life. If you would measure the height to which God has exalted you, consider how important you seemed; the more important you were, the lower the height you attained. Nevertheless, when God withdraws us from these moments of reality, we find the value has returned to the details of our daily life, for unless this happened we could not make progress or live to the glory of God. In those high moments of prayer we see that none of the things which make up our life have any value apart from the spiritual value which God gives to them. So at one moment in a stable there was a rough old wooden manger worth a few pence, and an hour later a manger

which the world would empty its purse to buy to-day. Those who have learnt this truth in prayer will always have a certain godly carelessness about what happens in their daily life. They will not be apathetic or disdainful, but they will see through the appearances to the reality beneath.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes.” Mount Nebo is in a world where time and space are merged in eternity and infinity, and those who see the view from thence see all history and all geography. Moses doubtless saw and understood the whole history of his people; marked on the map another mount which also existed in the world of reality, the Mount of the Transfiguration; saw far on in time the Church Militant; saw, perhaps dimly, a Church Triumphant. There are no limits to spiritual sight. All that he saw was real and marked with God’s mark. In moments of spiritual sight we seem to become supermen, to stretch out from our humanity to the Divinity of God. The bar of iron, white-hot in the furnace, forgets that the moment when the flame of the furnace is withdrawn it will return again to its former ignoble colour and shape. So Moses stood at the summit of Nebo, exalted, transfigured, supreme above men. And at that moment there sounded in his ear the still small voice which can never be mistaken for anything save the voice of God.

“But thou shalt not go over thither.” In that moment Mount Nebo fell into nothingness, and the form of Moses lay prostrate on the heights of Pisgah, knowing himself to be but one speck of dust before the Majesty of God. One might rashly think that it was on the summit of Mount Nebo that Moses knew all that man could

know of the Majesty of God, and therefore could best adore Him. In every truth it was when Mount Nebo crumbled under his feet that he gained his knowledge of the Majesty of God and truly adored Him. Adoration is the superb flower of that lowly plant called Humility. It is when the moment of vision is ended and we fall from the heights to our own level in the depths that we know for certain the greatness of God. We ought to thank Him more sincerely for that terrible realisation of our worthlessness and nothingness than we do for the moment of ecstasy. Yet how constantly we talk and feel as if we were making no progress, save on the summit of Nebo. Nay, more, we are apt to be bitter and ready to despair, when God gives us His best gift as we live in the dust and darkness. Do you think Moses would ever have stood by the side of the Incarnate Lord and discussed with Him the supreme humiliation of all history, if he had never fallen from the heights of Mount Nebo? He could never have discussed it, never have understood it, if he had not had that experience. Souls often say, "Why is it that, while I can meditate with pleasure and profit on all the other scenes of our Lord's life, His crucifixion means nothing to me?" The question is self-revealing. The soul who asks it has never passed through the crushing experience of the last humiliation.

The vision of Moses is a lesson for all souls who find God in a moment of reality. To all such souls there come moments of despair when they realise their own worthlessness and nothingness. At such moments the contrast of what they have known with what they are causes intense pain. They are tempted to give up all hope. The vision of Moses teaches that this very moment

of intense humiliation is the climax of God's mercy, the gift of love, and the sure promise of a hope to come.

"He buried him in a valley of the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor." No other choice could Moses make for his end. In a valley and not on a summit would he rest after that last great spiritual experience. Those who have tasted the joy and pain of true humility will always seek to rest in it for ever. Those who have passed from the summit of vision to the abandonment of humility are marked out from all other souls; you cannot tempt them with any great ambition—they desire to rest always in humility because they know its safety and its glory. Over against Beth-peor, from the bottom of that deep cleft in the hills, the soul of Moses rose in adoration to the footstool of God. Let us pray most earnestly that whatever our Lord in His mercy may give or take away, He will not let us depart this life without that great and glorious virtue of humility which will enable us to adore Him for ever in heaven.

#### (v) OF DIVINE VISITS

The world is full of the hubbub of voices crying "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" but still the Lord surprises the lowly Zaccheus by coming, an unexpected guest, into his home.

We could not love our Lord half so well were it not that He is full of those surprises which only love can plan, surprises which stagger all human imagination by their romance.

Mankind has always loved those fairy stories wherein the ploughboy by some sudden chance changes his hut for a palace. We love such stories perchance because

we dimly recognise behind them the verity of that eternal and glorious adventure whereby in a moment the poor shelter of a wretched soul is turned into the palace of the King of heaven.

Our dear Lord, when on earth, dwelt in many habitations, from the stable of Bethlehem to the palace of Caiaphas. He appeared to those who sought Him in many different ways—walking on the water or transfigured in glory. He has not changed His ways, for He still chooses many habitations, some perhaps which we should regard as little fit for His dignity, and still He comes in divers forms. Nevertheless to the soul who recognises Him there is but one form.

He is the source of all personality, for it is only because He loves us so intensely and so personally that we have any personality. Our personality is that which is drawn out of us by His intense and separate love for each one of us. It is not surprising then that His Personality, at whatever moment He comes, in whatever place, and under whatever guise, is always recognised. That which He has drawn out of us turns to its Source and its Creator instinctively, and even little love can instantly recognise Infinite Love.

Those, therefore, who welcome the Divine Visitor always recognise Him whom they entertain. Their recognition varies according to the degree of nearness and clearness which He allows, but it is always a recognition. We think beforehand within ourselves that, at the moment of His coming, we shall make all manner of fine speeches and behave ourselves worthily of His Majesty. Yet when He comes we forget ourselves and wait before Him in silence, or speak foolishly as love gives us speech. We are stripped of all those high-flown

sentiments which we think we ought to produce, and in their place we find only childish, simple things to say. Nothing gives to any friend or lover more joy than to find that it is a joy to his friend to be with him, and this joy is always ours when the Lord Jesus visits us. None can be with Him without knowing that His joy in being with us is beyond all power of expression. How vast and unthinkable is this humility of God, that He should find such joy in His creatures !

Poor souls at first, finding their lowly hut turned into a palace, think that they will rule in their new domain, but soon they learn that it is only lent to them for a space. The palace belongs to the King, and we are not allowed to plan and to arrange lest the perfect good deteriorate through our selfishness. So it is that the veil descends and we are left with only a dulled consciousness of our great joy. It abides for many days and fills each day with happiness, but it makes us long for the eternal day in which we shall share the palace as heirs and not as visitors. Perhaps it is because our Lord knows how sluggish we are that He so orders His visits to us. We need a sure knowledge of our promised end if we are to struggle towards it.

Such then is the Divine Visitor, and these are some of the marks of His visitation. Yet let none think they are the only marks or that they are the necessary ones, for each soul is treated by Him in the best way, and there are many ways.

Now let us all pray that our Lord's love may overcome all hindrances in us and that He may speedily be enabled to give us those joys which His love has planned. If we pray faithfully, be assured that this shall come to pass.



## (vi) OF WORSHIP IN THE SOUL

" True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."—*St. John* iv. 23.

Among the relics of the Roman Empire, so plentifully scattered over the south of France, there is one which seems to stand out and to claim a pre-eminence, alike by the splendour of its conception and the grandeur of its situation. It is a Roman aqueduct, called the Pont du Gard, and is constructed to carry a water supply over a river to the town of Nîmes. The impression it makes on the traveller is perhaps enhanced by the fact that he comes upon it so suddenly. Turning an abrupt corner of the road he finds himself beside a wide river, pent in between high and precipitous cliffs which seem to tower to the sky. There, suspended between earth and heaven, he sees the aqueduct, rising on three tiers of perfectly proportioned arches, and carrying along its crown the tunnel through which the water was transported from the summit of one cliff to the summit of the other. At first it seems incredible that such an edifice should rise from the river to such heights, and then, so perfectly proportioned are the parts, it seems to be a work of Nature, begotten of the cliffs in their desire to be united. In that vast work of human hands, long since dead and forgotten, which has defied the attacks of two thousand years, I see a fitting symbol of that highest of all human activities, which we call *worship*. Like it, worship, if we consider it, is so stupendous an ideal that it seems more than human, and yet is so natural that it seems an inborn part of ourselves. Like it, worship unites two points which seem to be separated by a bottomless gulf—God and man. Like it, worship

conveys a supply of life from the heights to the depths. I have said that the first sight of this aqueduct brings a sense of confusion to the onlooker, and I think the same is true of worship. Therefore it is the more necessary that we should begin any consideration of worship by trying to understand its nature, to find out what it really is and really does.

What is worship? It is a common enough word, but when we are faced by the question of its actual meaning we are apt to be puzzled. You may have noticed, in reading the Gospels, how rarely our Lord used definitions. He often explained things by stories and illustrations, He continually encouraged His hearers to think out things for themselves, but He very rarely defined them. Perhaps it was because He knew well the danger of a definition, knew that it is apt to narrow, and to confine within limits, the truth, until it becomes only a half-truth. He much preferred to enlarge His hearers' minds by pointing out the salient qualities of that which He was teaching, leading them on to a wider conception of the truth. So it was that in teaching the woman of Samaria about worship He did not define the meaning of the word, but rather led her into the heart of the whole matter by the qualities which He associated with worship. "*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" The essential marks by which we are to know and to judge worship are that it is "*in spirit and in truth.*" Let us try to understand this phrase, because it is the key to the understanding of worship.

The word "spirit" in Biblical language means that part of man's nature which holds, or is capable of holding, intercourse with God. If we say that the soul is that

part of us which has contact with God, then to worship "in spirit" is to worship in the soul. The place where worship takes place is in that highest region of humanity where the Divine and the human meet. But our Lord describes worship not only by its locality but also by its object. It is the object of worship which makes worship, there is no worship unless it is directed to the ultimate and infinite object—God. A true conception or realisation of God is an essential part of worship. Following then the teaching of our Lord, we are able to say that worship is a human activity which takes place in the soul in that part of us which has contact with God, and that it is directed to a God whom we truly know and in whom we truly believe. But it might be objected that to lay down the locality and the object of worship does not tell us what worship itself is. I think that it does; for, given the soul in contact with God, and given that it realises and knows God as the ultimate object of its aspiration, then worship automatically follows; for it is nothing else save the activity roused in the soul by the contemplation of its Maker and its God. The soul cannot gaze at God without worshipping. Worship is to be so conscious of God that we forget ourselves. The first three clauses of the Lord's Prayer are the sentiments of pure worship, for our Lord, when He said them, lost all earthly desires in the passion for the Father's glory. Thus adoration is the most selfless of all human activities. In its higher forms it produces the only moments in human life when self is blotted out and utterly forgotten. By "self" I do not mean personality, but rather all those accretions which personality gathers round it—those desires,

qualities, and characteristics which it claims as its own apart from God.

Having tried to see what is the nature of worship, we can next pass on to consider what conditions are requisite for it. It is obvious that the first necessity is that the soul should be placed in the Presence of God. It is the special work of God the Holy Ghost to accomplish this. Our Lord told us that when He came He was to be a guide: One who showed, who should take all that is of God and should show it unto us. It is, then, to the Holy Spirit that we should first turn if we would worship. There is one prayer which is always answered without fail, and on the instant, and that is the prayer to the Holy Spirit to bring us into the Presence of our Father in heaven through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are told of Denis, the Carthusian, that towards the end of his life, whenever he heard the *Veni Creator* he was at once wrapt in God and lifted up from the earth. If so, he did but manifest in an extreme degree that which happens to any soul, however feeble, who seeks the aid of the Holy Spirit to be brought into the Presence of God. Secondly, it is required that the soul shall by faith accept this working of the Divine Comforter. We must not, after such a prayer, depend upon our feelings, or even upon our consciousness, but rather we must rest on the firm conviction that we are face to face with God, that our soul is in contact with Him. We must in no wise move from this conviction, and it must be the basis of all we think or try to do. Thirdly, being thus in the very Presence of the living God, we must endeavour to concentrate all our gaze

on Him. We must try to look up into the Face of God.

Thomas Carlyle in a conversation with Holman Hunt once said to him : " I am only a poor man, but I can say in serious truth that I would give one-third of all I possess for a veritable contemporaneous representation of Jesus Christ." We have no need to sacrifice our possessions, or to win wealth to obtain a representation, for in the soul we can gaze on the living God, face to face, and in all reality. But we must gaze : that is to say, we must have so great a desire, so profound a longing, that we really seek to see God. I think the commonest cause of failure in worship is weakness of desire. It seems strange that this should be so, but very often it springs from the fact that some souls very rarely, or never, think of the possibility of being actually in the Presence of God and of gazing at Him. If we do not think of this possibility it is not likely that we shall desire it. Fourthly, the soul is required to remove all that hinders it from looking toward God. There are many such hindrances. If we intend to do something which we know or suspect is not quite right, if we hold back from repenting of some sin, if we are set on putting some interest before God—all these things will block the way and prevent our spiritual vision. But by far the most common of all hindrances lies in the great difficulty which we have in preventing our thoughts from rushing in every direction and distracting us from all effort and concentration. It is often overstrain or overwork which lessens our control over our minds, and so leave us a prey to the squirming octopus of unbridled thoughts. In this case we need more rest, and specially we need to spend some minutes before

we attempt to worship in seeking silence and spiritual rest and quietude. But more often our wandering thoughts are due to the fact that we are much more interested in the things we are doing than in the prospect of worshipping God. If this be the cause of wandering thoughts, then let us attack it at once. Let us put up a barrier and refuse to think of such things for the time, throwing them out of our minds each time that we discover they have effected a lodging there. Such then are the conditions requisite for worship in the soul. If we carry them out faithfully we shall reach some degree of adoration. It remains, therefore, to attempt to describe worship as an experience, to try and tell what it seems like to the soul engaged in it. I would remind you that there are many degrees of worship, from the feeblest attempt of the dullest soul to those heights of ecstasy reached by a great saint. But whatever the degree, the worship is the same in nature and purpose, and therefore the experience only differs in its intensity and vividness.

The essence of worship is that we should forget ourselves, but we can only forget ourselves if we are absorbed in something else. If we become absorbed in God, His Majesty, His love, and His goodness, then we can forget ourselves in truth. It is this forgetfulness which above all else marks the experience of adoration. According to the degree of our worship so God seems to be more and more important. It is at last as if the whole horizon were filled with God and we could see nothing else. We do not matter, nothing matters, if only God may have His due. It is from this forgetfulness that the prayer of worship rises. It is a prayer that God's glory may be fulfilled, that His love may be satisfied and that His

will may be accomplished. And according to its degree, so is the joy of this worship. The more we lose ourselves in the desire for God's glory, the more we share in the joy of God: that joy which far transcends all earthly ideas of joy. In the one work left by a holy man who lived in Germany in the fourteenth century, and of whom but little is known, this joy, reached in the heights of adoration, is well described in quaint language. Rulman Merswin (for such was his name) in his *Book of the Nine Rocks* thus describes that brief but overwhelming rapture which he experienced in worship: "When I came to myself I felt inundated with life and joy. Then I asked myself, 'Where have I been?' In my soul a voice answered me, 'You have been in the upper school of the Holy Spirit. There you were surrounded by the dazzling light of the Divine Wisdom. Your soul was lost therein with delight, and the Divine Master of the School has filled her with an exuberant joy.'" It is not given to us, perhaps, to have any great experience of worship such as this, but however small our experience it will bear the same marks, and it will bring with it the touch of a joy which is not of this earth, and which, once felt, can never be forgotten.

We have tried to see the nature of worship, how it proceeds from contact with the living God in the soul, how it requires the help of the Holy Spirit, the faith of the worshipper, his earnest desire, and the removal of hindrances. We have glanced at the experience of worship and the joy it brings. There is little need that we should conclude by any appeal for more worship; for everyone of us is filled with the desire to attain to this great activity. In patience and in quietude, therefore, let us seek of God the training and the growth

which will enable us to worship Him in spirit and in truth, confident that He will give to us that ask, that we who seek shall truly find, and that the door into His Presence will open to us if we knock with eager desire.

(vii) OF WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH

“The Father seeketh such to worship Him.”—*St. John* iv. 23.

In one of the apocryphal Gospels, commonly known as the Gospel of Nicodemus, there is a curious episode introduced into the account of the trial of our Lord. We are told that in front of Pilate's throne in the judgment hall there stood twelve standard-bearers holding before him the insignia of the Roman Empire. As Jesus was led into the hall and passed between the two lines of standard-bearers, the tops of the standards bent down and adored Him, to the consternation of the assembled Jews. This account is, I suppose, an attempt to put into a dramatic form that universal feeling that wherever the Divine Master is found, there, inevitably, must worship appear. It was the same feeling which our Lord Himself voiced when He told the Pharisees that if the multitude ceased to adore Him the stones would immediately cry out. And it is just because this instinct is universal that we find so great a help in united worship. To share a common desire with another is to increase our power of accomplishing it. There is an infection which proceeds from a united purpose which strengthens desire in each of those who unite for that purpose. So when Christians, each of whom is firm in the belief that to come into the Presence of God calls forth worship, meet together, they are greatly aided in that worship by their consciousness of a common



purpose and ideal. Nor do I think that this is the only or the greatest source of the help which is to be found in united worship. "*True worshippers,*" our Lord says, "*shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.*" We should say that this was a very daring statement had it been made by any other than our Lord. To think that the Infinite and Incomprehensible Majesty of God should seek our poor worship is indeed a mystery. Yet there the words stand, and we cannot do otherwise than conclude that, in addition to that strength which comes from union with our fellow-worshippers, there is also a strength which comes down to us from on high, from "the seeking" of the Father. It is a strange thought and one perhaps too little familiar to us, but it is a thought to which our experience bears witness. Who amongst us has not known the day when he went to worship for some cause or other unwillingly, perhaps through weariness, perhaps through a desire to do something else? We went into church and joined our fellow-worshippers in a dull and uninterested frame of mind. Then, to our surprise, we were conscious of a change taking place in our feelings. We ceased to feel disinclination, we even began to feel a faint longing. It was as though some power were drawing us upward in spite of all hindrances. Such is "the seeking" of the Father which marks and assists the gathering of His children to worship Him. And there is yet a third way in which united worship assists the soul who would worship.

Since God has so willed, we are all composed of spiritual and material elements. Soul and body in each of us are welded into one being, and therefore can never be

independent of each other. Through our body and its senses come influences which profoundly affect our soul. It is possible to procure many of these influences only when we are united. To some the influence which comes through music, to others that which comes through light and colour, to yet others that which appeals through rhythm and ordered movements, is an aid to worship; and such aids can be provided only where a number of Christians are gathered together. We have the right to seek this help in order to overcome our human frailty of purpose, and to procure that unity of all our being in worship which should be an activity of body, mind, and soul. You may remember that scene in Dante's *Divine Comedy* where the poet gains his first vision of the heaven of heavens. He sees there a river composed of pure light, flowing between banks which paint in all its wonder that birth and renewing of life which we on earth call Spring. From this river there rise continually living sparks of light, glowing like animated rubies. These settle on all sides, on the flowers which line the banks, and then, intoxicated by their sweet perfume, plunge back into the marvellous flood. Such, it seems to me, is the part played by all those adjuncts which dignify and assist united worship. Like flowers they provide a resting-place and an inspiration for the prayers of true worship which, stimulated by them, return again to join that current of praise which flows eternally before the very Throne of God.

There is, however, a sad illustration of the uncertainty of the balance betwixt human infirmity and Divine grace, which makes man the riddle of the world, in the fact that each of the helps to be found in united worship is capable of being turned into a hindrance. The union

with others in a common purpose may be a stimulus, but it can also be a distraction. There is one of our bishops who is wont to say after a period of conversation, "Now let us talk of things and not people;" but the ordinary human being is much more interested in people than in things. It follows, that the presence of others has a great power of distraction, for all our minds have in them the rudimentary elements of the detective, and we cannot see another person without raising a host of questions about him. I would suggest that it is not by accident that we have evolved the posture of prayer in the Church of Christ. Surely, kneeling is not only a symbol of humility, but is also a safeguard against the dangers of the wider view made possible by standing. Again, the folding of hands and the shutting of eyes is not only a picture of the ideal of restfulness in prayer, but is also a very practical provision against the disturbance which comes through the senses. We cannot neglect the defence provided by these acts, and we shall be aided in worship if we make them spiritual in intention rather than mere conventions.

There is also a hindrance to counterbalance that wonderful seeking of God which helps the worshipper. From all ages men have felt not only the joy and necessity of worship, but also its danger. It was, at any rate in part, from this instinct that there arose the stress laid on reverence. From the earliest times humanity has felt that it was an awful thing to approach the living God. In the Old Testament this is expressed by the belief that to see God in any clear and immediate manifestation meant death. The Bible has many examples, from Uzzah to Ananias, of men who approached sacred things in a wrong spirit and suffered a dire penalty.

It is, indeed, still a truth that to join in united worship in a careless frame of mind involves a great danger. The soul who rejects the advances of God punishes itself. It is possible to reject those advances by hardening one's heart, by erecting a wall against God, and that wall, once erected, grows in strength and extent till at last it becomes impenetrable. To approach united worship in a careless or frivolous spirit is to deaden the soul and to weaken the life of grace. It is for this reason that the Church teaches so strongly the need of preparation before the Holy Eucharist. It is for this reason that she places vigils before her great festivals. It is for this reason that the Christian composes himself for prayer the moment that he enters the church. The observance of these and like practices too often becomes a habit, and I would invite you to connect them again with their cause and origin, that you may use them as a protection against the dangers of a too light approach to the Majesty of God.

And, finally, there is a hindrance to be found in those adjuncts which assist us in united worship. It is a danger which our Lord foresaw while He was teaching the woman of Samaria. Terrified by the way in which Christ was beating down her defences, she sought to turn Him aside by putting forward the divergence of ceremonial between Samaritan and Jew. The answer was direct. "*Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*" He who is known as the Father finds His home where His children are. No outward conditions can hinder His "seeking." Like the woman of Samaria, we are all tempted at times to exaggerate the value and the importance of the adjuncts of worship.

We forget that they are helps, and look upon them as necessities, and the result of such a distorted view is always to lessen the spiritual perception, which leads in turn to a dislocation of the scale of virtues in our minds, so that charity and humility take the bottom place instead of the top. And, again, we must remember that while the senses can feed the soul they can also starve it. The glowing sparks of light in Dante's heavenly river did not remain upon the banks, but returned to the stream.

There is a danger lest we should become too absorbed in the adjuncts of worship and centre our attention on them to the neglect of the worship they should suggest. The remedy for this is to link each of these adjuncts with an aspiration.

Let nothing be done in united worship which does not suggest to you a prayer. See, hear, and feel nothing in the service which does not find expression in prayer.

No study of united worship, however slight, could possibly be complete without touching on the Holy Eucharist, which is the highest point of all earthly worship. In an Armenian version of the Apocryphal Lives of the Prophets there is to be found an episode which stands out from the rest of the book by its spiritual beauty. In describing the death of Jeremiah, the writer tells us that the prophet had managed to rescue the Ark of the Covenant, and he took it, with all that was contained therein, and hid it under a rock, and with his ring he impressed on the rock the Name of God. Then a luminous cloud hid it so that nobody is able to find the Ark or to read the Name. During each night there is a cloud of light, for the Grace of God never departs from that place. It seems to me there is in this account a

fitting symbol of the place occupied in worship by the Blessed Sacrament. We come to that great sacrifice conscious of a luminous cloud, covering the very secret of God and His dwelling-place. We are aware that there, most truly, is to be found the centre of our worship, that there, are depths of adoration to be explored, and, at the end, the secret of God's love. I do not think that either doctrine or theory can ever fully explain the Blessed Sacrament to the worshipper, for he is always conscious of an experience which refuses to be expressed in words. He knows that in some degree he has come in actual contact with the Living God, he knows that God has drawn out of him something which is the height of his being, he knows that this adoration which is drawn out of him is strengthened and shared by the experience of those around him, and that, because of this union with them, he can give and receive more than if he were alone. This then is, and always must be, the climax of united worship, and it is a climax which, unlike all other earthly summits, permits of endless extension.

Whatever we may have found in worship at the Blessed Eucharist, we may be sure that still further treasure awaits our search. The Holy Grail did not leave this earth with Galahad, as the legend suggests, for it is still found by those who search in adoration for the secret of God's love. For each spiritual adventurer, leaving self wholly behind in worship, the shrine which hides it is still opened.

It is not the purpose of these studies in worship to institute any comparison between the different manifestations of this spiritual activity, for they are all one in origin and purpose. Nevertheless we cannot

but see that in united worship the soul has great assistance from the strength which comes from the sharing of a common purpose with others, from the seeking of the Father for His worshippers, and from those adjuncts which are only possible when a congregation is collected together. These helps are balanced by certain dangers, which, however, need but a steadfast purpose and intention for their cure. And, as we understand these advantages of united worship, we shall understand why the Church of Christ in all ages has made the Holy Eucharist the centre of her worship, the true test of her membership, and the daily necessity of her life.

#### (viii) OF WORSHIP IN HEAVEN

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”—*St. John* iv. 24.

It is because the word “spirit” is used twice in this verse that we can take as the subject of our thought worship as it is in heaven. In other words, it is because there is in each one of us something which can have contact with God that we can dare to peer into that glory which surrounds God. And in order that we might be aided in doing this, we have been linked up “in a wonderful order” with spiritual beings who dwell for ever in heaven. I think the boldest mind might draw back from the attempt if it were not for this direct link with worship in heaven. It has pleased the Eternal Love to ordain this body of spiritual beings whom we call Angels, not to acquire for Himself any good, but that His splendour, shining back with a reflected light, might be able, through all eternity, outside all time and space, to raise the great cry of adoration, “Holy, Holy,

Holy." The Jews of old held that Moses in the mount was allowed to see the actual worship of heaven, and that the tabernacle in the desert was the reproduction of a heavenly tabernacle, the shadow on earth of the tabernacle of light. So we might say that our worship on earth is the shadow of worship in heaven and owes its origin to it—that worship is the reflection of the glory of God by the Holy Angels, and has its source in the ineffable mystery of the self-contemplation of God. Worship is the light reflected back by the mirror which is set in the Presence of God.

In speaking of things which pass human comprehension we are forced to use symbols, and there is no better symbol of worship than the mirror. In a mirror the whole surface is filled with the object reflected, in a mirror the reflection sent forth is wholly due to the object reflected, in a mirror the reflection is directed to the object reflected. So it is with the ideal worship of heaven; for there the spiritual being who worships is filled wholly and entirely with the glory of God, to the exclusion of all self-consciousness. Again, the reflection of this glory which makes worship is wholly due to God, and proceeds from Him. And, further, this reflection returns to God and is directed solely to Him. We may say of worship in heaven that it is not an effort but a life, as natural as breathing, as inevitable as existing. Those who have shrunk from the idea of an eternity spent in worship have done so because they thought of worship as it is on earth, a continual strife to overcome the hindrances of self-love and self-consciousness, but worship in heaven knows no hindrances, and becomes the normal activity of spiritual life. Nor shall we approximate as fully as we can to the truth if we liken it only

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to a perpetual function of existence, for worship in heaven is penetrated and fulfilled with joy. There have been moments in every life, perhaps in spring-time, perhaps in the country among the solitudes of nature, when mere existence became a joy, when the consciousness of being alive and in possession of all our human faculties was sheer delight. Such joy is one of the elements of worship in heaven. Some of the Saints of old, who in the heights of prayer were drawn up into this ecstasy of adoration, found for it a strange name—they called it “*mors angelorum*,” the death of Angels. They were trying in this way to express the extremity of joy which marks that direct worship where no obstacle separates God and the soul. I think the shadow of this joy has fallen on earth. In moments of prayer, when our contact with God has been unusually close, we have felt something of the sheer delight which passes all expression or explanation, which lingers in the soul long after the experience has passed, and which never wholly leaves the memory. It is this joy which perpetually fills the Holy Angels, which inspires that celestial music which was heard by the Shepherds of Bethlehem, by St. John in Patmos, and of which echoes are still to be caught on this earth. The eternal reflection of the glory of God in heaven is also an eternity of bliss.

If we may return once more to the symbol of the mirror, I would ask you to note how the apparent activity of the glass depends on light. Place the mirror in darkness and to all appearance it ceases to exist, admit one ray of light and it begins to live, and the greater the light the more full of brightness and activity it becomes. So is it with the Holy Angels, for their reflection of God not only fills them with joy, but also with

life. They do but give back that which they receive, yet in the process they are filled with inexhaustible life. They do always behold the face of the Father in heaven, and in that sight they receive a life transcending all thought. It is noteworthy that the ministry of angels in our Lord's personal life was at times of exhaustion and weariness, when His chief need was strength and vitality. We all know by experience the relation between life and activity; in proportion to our lack of vitality our work becomes a burden and loses its value. It is the life poured into the angels in the very exercise of their worship which fills with vigour and joy their adoration. The Revelation of St. John the Divine is full of suggestions that the worship of heaven has a force unknown to earth, a power at which we cannot guess, which is due to the wonderful life which penetrates it.

If the worship of heaven were something totally cut off from earth and peculiar to itself, it would be of little value to discuss it, and far better to wait until we could join in it. But the truth is very different from this, for the heavenly adoration is closely linked with the worship of earth. This verity is nowhere more beautifully stated than in the Sanctus, which finds its fitting place in the Liturgy. There we are expressly joined with Angels and Archangels and with the whole company of heaven. I would lay stress on the point that this is not an expression of opinion or sentiment, but an actual fact. At that moment in the Holy Eucharist we do enter into real and active partnership with the worship of heaven. As specks of dust, it may be, beneath the feet of Angels and Saints, we do reflect the glory of God and unite with them in sending forth

to Him the adoration which is the existence of heaven. Worship in heaven can never be an abstraction to us, for we also, here on earth, have our part in it. Linked by the will of God with Saints and Angels, our poor stammering praise rises with theirs to the Throne of the Eternal Majesty. How much we owe to this fact we shall probably never know; but if there is an infection and inspiration from union with our fellow-worshippers on earth, it would be hard to exaggerate the power which comes to us from union with the Angelic Host.

I venture to think that this is no statement of opinion, but the expression of an experience shared by many souls. Sometimes at the Holy Eucharist the veil which divides us from the world of spirit seems to grow transparent, the consciousness of heavenly presences is all around us, the Angelic Hosts move about us and with us, and in the force of their ecstasy of adoration we are lifted up to heights of worship far beyond our natural power. It is after such an experience that we are most painfully aware of our limitations. Why is it that we are stopped on the threshold of an activity which fulfils all our desires? Why cannot we pass on and be wholly lost in this supreme delight of heaven? The answer to our questions is all too plainly written in our conscience. Always we are anchored to earth by the fact that we love ourselves, that there are desires, possessions, hopes, which we will not or cannot share with God. These it is which force us to part company with the host of Angels as they wheel upward in the strong, level flight of praise. If only we had more courage, if only we would cut more deeply at the roots of pride and selfishness, what limits could bar our way?

It was related of that remarkable man, the Abbot Joachim of Floris, that while he was still a young monk he was walking one day in the garden meditating on God. Along the avenue of trees under which he paced he saw a young man of great beauty approaching him, holding in his hand a vessel of wine. "Joachim," said the unknown, "take this vessel and drink of the wine, for it is delicious." Having drunk of it, the young monk returned the vessel, but the Angel said, "O Joachim, if you had but drunk it to the last drop there would have been no height of holiness left unknown to you." That wine was the bitter draught of self-surrender and self-discipline. It is because we none of us dare drain this vintage to the end that we cannot fully join in the worship of heaven. There is but one way in which the soul can fit itself for the heights of adoration, and that is the way of the Cross, wherein self-love dies of crucifixion and the soul enters into a new life of communion with God. Nevertheless, if we may not rise with the Angels to the heights of worship, we can at least share in something of the joy they find in it. There is a satisfaction in the exercise of any human activity, but when the activity is the highest, because the most selfless, which man can use, this satisfaction becomes joy.

The Pagans in the days of the Early Church invented a slang name for the Christians, they called them "crickets of the night," because they were wont to awaken their neighbours by the sound of hymns and psalms which they offered up to God at all hours. In those early days, when the Gospel was preached by men whose eyes had seen the very Christ in the flesh, the fire of the new life burnt bright, and Christians had no

greater joy than was to be found in worship. Their joy poured out in worship, of necessity, by day and night. Perhaps we have lost something they had, or, as I hope, perhaps we are slowly growing to it; but I am certain of this, that any great revival of the spiritual life amongst us will lead to a great outburst of worship and find in it the true outlet of joy. And if we on earth share now in the joy of worship in heaven, so do we share also in its life. In adoration the life which the reflection of God's glory leaves in the Holy Angels passes also to us. Worship is life-giving to the Church, and any sect which exalts preaching at the expense of worship is doomed to death.

The world is ever gazing at the Church and trying to measure the life which is in her, and we feel ourselves the urgent need of increasing her force and vitality. The way we shall do it is by more worthy worship, by closer union with the Angels of heaven.

It was my privilege, not long ago, to listen to a man who is reputed to be the most learned man in the world. In the course of his speech he said these words: "There have been many poets in this world; there has been a Shakespeare, and we have also had an Eliza Cook. It is the same in religion; there also have been Shakespeares and Eliza Cooks. I would implore you in religion to be Shakespeares, for there are too many Eliza Cooks." I would venture to re-echo his words with regard to worship; we need a little less mediocrity and a little more talent in worship. To any soul who will pay a great price and undertake a fierce warfare, the heights of worship are open. By long training, by constant practice, by self-discipline and self-renunciation, by the following of Christ in the way of the Cross, is the road open to

those heavenly places where Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven do continually offer up to God their eternal adoration. For each one of us, in the infinite love of God, there is an appointed place in that great company, an allotted part in that vast Ter Sanctus of heaven. Here on earth, in the shrine of our soul, and when the Gates of Paradise are flung wide open in the Holy Eucharist, let us strive our utmost to rise in adoration, that we fail not hereafter to share in the worship of heaven.

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